



ace
book
F-162
40¢

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Seventh Series

**Edited by
Anthony Boucher**

"If you like science-fiction, you'll like this."

Complete & Unabridged

—San Francisco Chronicle

DAMON KNIGHT, Science-Fiction Critic, wrote
in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

"The seventh series of *The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction*, edited by Anthony Boucher, gives us fifteen calm, literate and funny stories, of which the best to my taste are Poul Anderson's *Journey's End*, with its bitter twist on the old telepathic-mutant theme, and Fritz Leiber's *The Big Trek* . . . joyful and ingratiating.

"Also notable: G. C. Edmondson's wry story of a Martian Crusoe; Chad Oliver's moving novelette of well-meant interstellar bungling; Mildred Clingerman's mystery horror tale; Will Stanton's deadpan spoof; Robert F. Young's story of an Earth goddess and a death wish; and C. M. Kornbluth's desperately ironic *Ms Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie*.

"The book improves as it goes along . . . the later stories have not only elegance but wallop."

QUOTES FROM REVIEWS:

"A first-class roundup of the best in a field."

—*Los Angeles Mirror News*

"May be the most satisfactory collection of science-fiction stories yet assembled in one volume."

—*Savannah News*

"Fantasy at its best,"

—*Houston Chronicle*

"Even better and more readable than its predecessors."

—*Best Sellers*

"You like SF, you'll like this."

—*San Francisco News*

The Best From
FANTASY
and
SCIENCE FICTION

Seventh Series

Edited by
ANTHONY BOUCHER

ACE BOOKS, INC.
23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N.Y.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: Seventh Series

Copyright ©, 1956, 1957, 1958 by Fantasy House, Inc.

An Ace Book, by arrangement with Doubleday & Co., Inc.

All Rights Reserved

This book is fiction, and all the characters and incidents in it are entirely imaginary.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

For
MILDRED CLINGMAN
most serendipitous of
discoveries

Contents

INTRODUCTION	9
1 IDRIS SEABRIGHT <i>The Wines of Earth</i>	13
2 WARD MOORE <i>Adjustment</i>	21
3 BERTRAM CHANDLER <i>The Cage</i>	45
4 AVRAM DAVIDSON <i>Mr. Stilwell's Stage</i>	59
5 ARTHUR C. CLARKE <i>Venture to the Moon</i>	71
6 FREDRIC BROWN <i>Expedition</i>	101
7 G. C. EDMONDSON <i>Rescue</i>	104
8 CHAD OLIVER <i>Between the Thunder and the Sun</i>	115
9 ISAAC ASIMOV <i>A Loint of Paw</i>	173
10 MILDRED CLINGERMAN <i>The Wild Wood</i>	176
11 WILL STANTON <i>Dodger Fan</i>	187
12 ROBERT F. YOUNG <i>Goddess in Granite</i>	194
13 C. M. KORNBLUTH <i>Ms. Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie</i>	222
14 POUL ANDERSON <i>Journey's End</i>	236
15 FRITZ LEIBER <i>The Big Trek</i>	247

INTRODUCTION

THE TROUBLE with generalizing, as introductions are apt to, about The Future of Science Fiction is that you have no idea what as yet unpublished writers are coming along, tomorrow or the next day, to shape that future.

The one thing we can be sure of, if the past is any guide, is that there will always be a fresh new generation of creators, and that the best of the Old Pros will match strides with the eager innovations of the Bright Young Men—which seems a most healthy and satisfactory state of affairs.

This volume quite accidentally happens to represent a survey of the various generations which have formed modern science-fantasy:

First there are the pioneers, who began writing fifteen to twenty years ago when magazine s.f. was retooling from ponderous gadgetry to literate entertainment—Isaac Asimov, Fredric Brown, C. M. Kornbluth, Fritz Leiber.

Then there is the group that arose during and after the war, in the forties, when modern s.f. was firmly established (if as yet unnoticed by book publishers)—Poul Anderson, Bertram Chandler, Arthur C. Clarke, Ward Moore, Idris Seabright.

Next come the authors who made their debut during the

INTRODUCTION

false-dawn "boom" of the early 1950's, and happily survived the bust that followed—Mildred Clingerman, Avram Davidson, Chad Oliver, Will Stanton. (The first three, I might add with pride, are all F&SF discoveries.)

And lastly the newest writers of the last year or two—G. C. Edmondson, Robert F. Young.

These chronological groupings do not represent "schools" or "trends"—these are writers far too individualistic for such convenient labeling. But they do represent the constant infusion of fresh creative personalities, the ever-renewed challenge of different approaches to the craft (or indeed the art) of science fiction.

As healthily reassuring as this phenomenon is the versatility of these writers, the diversity of their literary interests.

Few of them are full-time writers (who can afford to be?); they have other occupations, ranging from teaching and lecturing to sheet-metal work and housekeeping. But even as writers few of them specialize entirely in writing for the science fiction magazines. They are aware that there is a world elsewhere; and that awareness keeps them from addressing too intensively narrowed an audience.

Asimov and Clarke are important writers of non-fictional science. Kornbluth and Moore have published successful straight novels. Clingerman, Davidson and Stanton appear from time to time in major slick-paper magazines. Brown's reputation is even greater in the mystery field than in s.f. Anderson, Brown, Davidson, Edmondson and Stanton are all prize-winning contributors to F&SF's sister publication, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

And if current Works in Progress are completed and published, you may expect to read soon a historical novel by Poul Anderson, a mystery by Isaac Asimov, a serious contemporary novel by Chad Oliver, and a fictional study of Boccaccio by Idris Seabright.

These two factors—the constant refreshing of the bloodstream of s.f. and the avoidance, on the part of its best authors, of sterile Science-Fiction-Is-a-Way-of-Life speciali-

INTRODUCTION

zation—enable one to make a single conjecture as to the future of the field: that it will be as unpredictable and stimulating as I hope you find these samples of its present.

ANTHONY BOUCHER

Berkeley, California

IDRIS SEABRIGHT

Ellery Queen once introduced a Dorothy Sayers story with the words, "Chiefly we liked A Matter of Taste because it made us thirsty." This gentle Seabright story has the same thirstifying quality, and occupies this opening position as a dry and delicate apéritif.

THE WINES OF EARTH

JOE DA VALORA grew wine in the Napa Valley. The growing of premium wine is never especially profitable in California, and Joe could have made considerably more money if he had raised soybeans or planted his acreage in prunes. The paperwork involved in his occupation was a nightmare to him; he filled out tax and license forms for state and federal governments until he had moments of feeling his soul was made out in triplicate, and he worked hard in the fields too. His son used to ask him why he didn't go into something easier. Sometimes he wondered himself.

But lovers of the vine, like all lovers, are stubborn and unreasonable men. And as with other lovers, their unreasonableness has its compensations. Joe da Valora got a good deal of satisfaction from the knowledge that he made some of the best Zinfandel in California (the Pinot Noir, his first love, he had had to abandon as not coming to its full excellence in his particular part of the Napa Valley). He vintaged the best

of his wine carefully, slaved over the vinification to bring out the wine's full freshness and fruitiness, and had once sold an entire year's product to one of the "big business" wineries, rather than bottling it himself, because he thought it had a faint but objectionable "hot" taste.

Joe da Valora lived alone. His wife was dead, and his son had married a girl who didn't like the country. Often they came to see him on Sundays, and they bought him expensive gifts at Christmas time. Still, his evenings were apt to be long. If he sometimes drank a little too much of his own product, so that he went to bed with the edges of things a bit blurred, it did him no harm. Dry red table wine is a wholesome beverage, and he was never any the worse for it in the morning. On the nights when things needed blurring, he was careful not to touch the vintaged Zinfandel. It was too good a wine to waste on things that had to be blurred.

Early in December, when the vintage was over and the new wine was quietly doing the last of its fermentation in the storage containers, he awoke to the steady drumming of rain on his roof. Well. He'd get caught up on his book-keeping. He hoped the rain wouldn't be too hard. Eight of his acres were on a hillside, and after every rain he had to do some reterracing.

About eleven, when he was adding up a long column of figures, he felt a sort of soundless jarring in the air. He couldn't tell whether it was real or whether he had imagined it. Probably the latter. His hearing wasn't any too good these days. He shook his head to clear it, and poured himself a glass of the unvintaged Zinfandel.

After lunch the rain stopped and the sky grew bright. He finished his noon-time glass of wine and started out for a breath of air. As he left the house he realized that he was just a little, little tipsy. Well, that wasn't such a bad way for a vintner to be. He'd go up to the hillside acres and see how they did.

There had been very little soil washing, he saw, inspecting the hillside. The reterracing would be at a minimum. In fact,

most of the soil removal he was doing himself, on the soles of his boots. He straightened up, feeling pleased.

Ahead of him on the slope four young people were standing, two men and two girls.

Da Valora felt a twinge of annoyance and alarm. What were they doing here? A vineyard out of leaf isn't attractive, and the hillside was well back from the road. He'd never had any trouble with vandals, only with deer. If these people tramped around on the wet earth, they'd break the terracing down.

As he got within speaking distance of them, one of the girls stepped forward. She had hair of an extraordinary copper-gold, and vivid, intensely turquoise eyes. (The other girl had black hair, and the two men were dark blonds.) Something about the group puzzled da Valora, and then he located it. They were all dressed exactly alike.

"Hello," the girl said.

"Hello," da Valora answered. Now that he was near to them, his anxiety about the vines had left him. It was as if their mere proximity—and he was to experience this effect during all the hours they spent with him—as if their mere proximity both stimulated and soothed his intellect, so that cares and pettinesses dropped away from him, and he moved in a larger air. He seemed to apprehend whatever they said directly, in a deeper way than words are usually apprehended, and with a wonderful naturalness.

"Hello," the girl repeated. "We've come from"—somehow the word escaped Joe's hearing—"to see the vines."

"Well, now," said Joe, pleased, "have you seen enough of them? This planting is Zinfandel. If you have, we might go through the winery. And then we might sample a little wine."

Yes, they would like to. They would all like that.

They moved beside him in a group, walking lightly and not picking up any of the wet earth on their feet. As they walked along they told him about themselves. They were winegrowers themselves, the four of them, though they

seemed so young, in a sort of loose partnership, and they were making a winegrowers' tour of—of—

Again Joe's hearing failed him. But he had the fancy that there would never be any conflict of will among the four of them. Their tastes and wishes would blend like four harmonious voices, the women's high and clear, the men's richer and more deep. Yet it seemed to him that the copper-haired girl was regarded with a certain deference by her companions, and he thought, wisely, that he knew the reason. It was what he had so often told his wife—that when a lady really likes wine, when she really has a palate for it, nobody can beat her judgment. So the others respected her.

He showed them through the winery without shame, without pride. If there were bigger wineries than his in the Napa valley, there were smaller ones too. And he knew he made good wine.

Back in the house he got out a bottle of his vintaged Zinfandel, the best Zinfandel he had ever made, for them. It wasn't only that they were fellow growers, he also wanted to please them. It was the '51.

As he poured the dark, fragrant stuff into their glasses he said, "What did you say the name of your firm was? Where did you say you were from?"

"It isn't exactly a firm," the dark-haired girl said, laughing. "And you wouldn't know the name of our home star."

Star? Star? Joe da Valora's hand shook so that he dribbled wine outside the glass. But what else had he expected? Hadn't he known from the moment he had seen them standing on the hillside? Of course they were from another star.

"And you're making a tour . . . ?" he asked, putting down the bottle carefully.

"Of the nearer galaxy. We have only a few hours to devote to Earth."

They drank. Joe da Valora wasn't surprised when only one of the men, the darker blond, praised the wine with much vigor. No doubt they'd tasted better. He wasn't hurt; they'd never want to hurt him—or at least not much hurt.

THE WINES OF EARTH

Yet as he looked at the four of them sitting around his dining table—so young, so wise, so kind—he was fired with a sudden honorable ambition. If they were only going to be here a few hours, then it was up to him, since nobody else could do it—it was up to him to champion the wines of Earth.

"Have you been to France?" he asked.

"France?" the dark-haired girl answered. So he knew the answer to the question.

"Wait," he told them, "wait. I'll be back." He went clattering down the cellar stairs.

In the cellar, he hesitated. He had a few bottles of the best Pinot Noir grown in the Napa Valley; and that meant—nobody could question it—the best Pinot Noir grown in California. But which year should he bring? The '43 was the better balanced, feminine, regal, round, and delicate. The '42 was a greater wine, but its inherent imbalance and its age had made it arrive at the state that winemakers call fragile. One bottle of it would be glorious, the next vapid, passé and flat.

In the end, he settled on the '42. He'd take his chances. Just before he left the cellar, he picked up another bottle and carried it up with him. It was something his son had given him a couple of years ago; he'd been saving it for some great occasion. After all, he was championing the wines of *Earth*.

He opened the '42 anxiously. It was too bad he hadn't known about their coming earlier. The burgundy would have benefited by longer contact with the air. But the first whiff of the wine's great nose reassured him; this bottle was going to be all right.

He got clean glasses, the biggest he had, and poured an inch of the wine into them. He watched wordlessly as they took the wine into their mouths, swished it around on their palates, and chewed it, after the fashion of winetasters everywhere. The girl with the copper hair kept swirling her glass and inhaling the wine's perfume. He waited tensely for what she would say.

At last she spoke. "Very sound. Very good."

Joe da Valora felt a pang of disappointment whose intensity

astonished him. He looked at the girl searchingly. Her face was sad. But she was honest. "Very sound, very good," was all that she could say.

Well, he still had an arrow left in his quiver. Even if it wasn't a California arrow. His hands were trembling as he drew the cork out of the bottle of Romanée-Conti '47 his son had given him. (Where had Harold got it? The wine, da Valora understood, was rare even in France. But the appellation of origin was in order. Harold must have paid a lot for it.)

More glasses. The magnificent perfume of the wine rose to his nose like a promise. Surely this . . .

There was a long silence. The girl with the dark hair finished her wine and held out her glass for more. At last the other girl said, "A fine wine. Yes, a fine wine."

For a moment Joe da Valora felt he hated her. Her, and the others. Who were these insolent young strangers, to come to Earth, drink the flower, the cream, the very pearl, of Earth's vintages, and dismiss it with so slight a compliment? Joe had been drinking wine all his life. In the hierarchy of fine wines, the Zinfandel he made was a petty princeling; the Pinot '42 was a great lord; but the wine he had just given them to drink was the sovereign, unquestioned emperor. He didn't think it would be possible to grow a better wine on Earth.

The girl with the copper-gold hair got up from the table. "Come to our ship," she said. "Please. We want you to taste the wine we make."

Still a little angry, Joe went with them. The sun was still well up, but the sky was getting overcast. It would rain again before night.

The ship was in a hollow behind the hillside vineyard. It was a big silver sphere, flattened at the bottom, that hovered a few feet above the rows of vines. The copper-haired girl took his hand, touched a stud at her belt, and they rose smoothly through the flattened bottom into a sort of foyer. The others followed them.

THE WINES OF EARTH

The ship's interior made little impression on Joe da Valora. He sat down on a chair of some sort and waited while the copper-haired girl went into a pantry and came back with a bottle.

"Our best wine," she said, holding it out for him to see.

The container itself was smaller and squatter than an Earth bottle. From it she poured a wine that was almost brownish. He was impressed by its body even in the glass.

He swirled the wine glass. It seemed to him he smelled violets and hazelnuts, and some other perfume, rich and delicate, whose name he didn't know. He could have been satisfied for a half hour only inhaling the wine's perfume. At last he sipped at it.

"Oh," he said when he had swished it in his mouth, let it bathe his palate, and slowly trickle down his throat. "Oh."

"We don't make much of it," she said, pouring more into his glass. "The grapes are so hard to grow."

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "Now I see why you said, 'A fine wine.'"

"Yes. We're sorry, dear Earth man."

"Don't be sorry," he said, smiling. He felt no sting of inferiority, no shame for Earth. The distance was too great. You couldn't expect Earth vines to grow the wine of paradise.

They were all drinking now, taking the wine in tiny sips, so he saw how precious it was to them. But first one and then the other of them would fill his glass.

The wine was making him bold. He licked his lips, and said, "Cuttings? Could you . . . give me cuttings? I'd take them to, to the University. To Davis." Even as he spoke he knew how hopeless the words were.

The darker blond man shook his head. "They wouldn't grow on Earth."

The bottle was empty. Once or twice one of the four had gone to a machine and touched buttons and punched tapes on it. He knew they must be getting ready to go. He rose to leave.

"Goodby," he said. "Thank you." He held out his hand to

them in leave-taking. But all of them, the men too, kissed him lightly and lovingly on the cheek.

"Goodby, dear human man," the girl with the copper hair said. "Goodby, goodby."

He left the ship. He stood at a distance and watched it lift lightly and effortlessly to the height of the trees. There was a pause, while the ship hovered and he wondered anxiously if something had gone wrong. Then the ship descended a few feet and the copper-haired girl jumped lightly out of it. She came running toward him, one of the small, squat bottles in her hand. She held it out to him.

"I can't take it—" he said.

"Oh, yes. You must. We want you to have it." She thrust it into his hands.

She ran back to the ship. It rose up again, shimmered, and was gone.

Joe da Valora looked at where the ship had been. The gods had come and gone. Was this how Dionysus had come to the Greeks? Divine, bearing a cargo that was divine? Now that they were gone, he realized how much in love with them he had been.

At last he drew a long sigh. He was where he had always been. His life would go on as it always had. Taxes, licenses, a mountain of paperwork, bad weather, public indifference, the attacks of local-optionists—all would be as it had been. But he had the bottle of wine they had given him. He knew there would never, in all his foreseeable life (he was sixty-five), be an event happy enough to warrant his opening it. But they had given him one of their last three bottles.

He was smiling as he went back to the house.

WARD MOORE

Even Ward Moore's most serious and disturbing stories show welcome glints of observant humor, but rarely to such an extent as in this delightful fantasy of psychiatry and wish-fulfilment—which still manages seriously to suggest a notion or two as to the true nature of

ADJUSTMENT

DR. GAYLER'S explanations were superfluous; I understood fully. I've looked through enough books with case histories (Charles X, 24, pronounced hyperthyroid, had recurrent dreams of driving Mary Y down a narrow dirt road in a bathtub) to know that the identities of patients are deliberately obscured. Anyway, curiosity—beyond the normal desire for useful information—isn't a vice of mine. In fact I rather pride myself on not having vices. I'm not the kind who boasts of smoking two packs a day or getting drunk Saturday nights, gambling, or having affairs. I try to lead a clean, decent life, and I'm not ashamed of having been a Boy Scout or a member of the Epworth League.

"You're the nearest we have found to a completely adjusted individual," he said.

I wished he would come to the point. I don't find psychiatrists' offices fascinating; quite the contrary. The advanced paintings on the walls gave me astigmatism. The readable magazines like *Life* and the *National Geographic* were out

of date; the unreadable ones, *Accent*, *Partisan Review*, *Could*, I thought better left unread. I wasn't bored; no sensible person allows himself to get that way. But if I had, Dr. Gayler and his office would have brought it on.

"You went through high school with an average grade of B; you graduated from D—twenty-fifth in a class of fifty. You were immediately hired by the—"

"Fifth National Bank of Republic City. Where I still work."

"You live with your widowed mother, F—S—," he filled in. "For whom you bought a new washing machine from Sears—"

"Shouldn't that be S—R—?" Perhaps I don't guffaw at stupid jokes, but I have a sense of humor.

"Possibly," conceded Dr. Gayler. "And other household conveniences, on which you owe a balance of—"

"I've never been a day behind on my payments."

"I'm sure of that. Believe me, I'm not playing back facts you already know just to—"

"Then why are you? I don't want to be rude, Doctor, and I can't pretend my time is valuable to anyone but myself—"

"There's a year's salary for two weeks of your time in this for you, Mr. Squith. Two weeks in pleasant, if dull, surroundings, with room, board and laundry thrown in."

"I'm in no position to take two weeks off from the bank."

He smiled and leaned back. "My patient has a close relative who owns a bit of stock in the Fifth National. There'll be no trouble about a vacation with pay."

"Do you mind explaining just what it is you want of me?"

"Not at all, Mr. Squith. My patient is a young man of your own age—"

"Twenty-six." I knew he knew I was born in 1934, but I said it anyway.

"Exactly. Unfortunately he lacks your stability. He is, in fact, slightly, ah, disturbed."

"Insane," I said bluntly. "There's no use beating around the bush. Call a spade a spade."

"Not at all. Of course the term has been outmoded for

ADJUSTMENT

a long time; even so, my patient is not psychotic in the way I think you mean. He has to some extent lost contact with reality—

"Thinks he's Napoleon?"

Dr. Gayler smiled again. "An infrequent delusion; personally I've never come across it. No, his divorce from reality is more subtle. He knows who he is and in what century he's living. However, he has not been able to accept the disagreeable aspects of life. As you and I do. So he has withdrawn into a world of his own devising—"

"You mean he has hallucinations?"

When I refused his proffered cigarette he lit one himself. "Let's not bother with words that mean different things at different times. Let's just say he has withdrawn."

"All right," I agreed. "I still don't see where I come in."

"I could use several different techniques to help him adjust. Hypnosis. Extended psychoanalysis. Drugs. All timetaking, none entirely satisfactory. However, there is a new method with good results reported. You might call it facsimile-therapy, if you wanted to be facetious."

I didn't want to be facetious. "Being around someone normal will make him normal too?"

He blew smoke through his nostrils before snubbing out the cigarette. "If it were that simple, all sorts of problems would have stopped existing long ago. It would do my patient little good just to observe a man who has no trouble accepting reality—a balanced person like yourself—to listen and talk, on no matter how intimate a basis. He must be convinced of the happiness of an adjusted man. He must see into the sound mind, to understand how it can accept what his own has rejected. To put it on—metaphorically—to impose it over his own, as one puts a cast on a broken leg to hold the bones and muscles in the proper place while it heals."

I wasn't too pleased at having my mind compared to a plaster cast. Not that I regard myself as a Thinker with a capital T. Intellectuals with round shoulders and spindly legs

are just as unwholesome as the opposite. A sound mind in a sound body is my motto.

Still, Dr. Gayler had a point, no matter how clumsily made. Anyone afraid to face the rough and tumble of everyday life must be soft, not to say weak; reinforcement from a man of character was bound to help. I could imagine easily enough what his patient must be like: too much money, and not enough to occupy his time. Dissipated surely, incapable of simple enjoyments; slack-jawed and shift-eyed.

I was both right and wrong, as I discovered after I talked with Mr. McIlforth—our Cashier and my immediate superior—and decided to accept Dr. Gayler's proposition. I'm afraid I wasn't entirely truthful to my Mother when I explained I was going away on business for two weeks, but then I wasn't entirely untruthful either. At any rate, I packed my bag and arrived at the sanitarium before dinnertime. Dr. Gayler shook hands, a formality I thought rather superfluous, and introduced me to Robert Wais.

Shift-eyed he was not, but I'm afraid dissipated was accurate. As soon as we were alone (did I say the arrangement called for sharing the same quarters?) he asked, "What about a drink, kid? I'm parched."

I don't like being called kid, and I never take anything but a glass of beer on a warm evening or a toast to auld lang syne on New Year's Eve. "Surely there's some rule in this place against—"

"Not a one." He brought out a bottle and got a tumbler from the bathroom. "That is, not for me, and I guess what goes for me goes for you too. Sky's the limit; drink hearty. Sorry I haven't got anything better than this"—he held up the bottle and I read the famous label which is advertised by testimonials from important people who would have been better advised to avoid alcohol, but of whose taste in liquor there can be no doubt—"but you just can't get decent stuff on this side."

"This side of what?" I asked.

He stared at me over the rim of his glass. "Don't hand me

ADJUSTMENT

a line. I'm here because I made a deal with my family and that head-shrinker, not because they have me fooled. They kept pestering me till they wore me down and I said I'd give this guff a try if they'd leave me alone afterward."

He was far gone, clearly. "I don't care for any, but don't let me stop you."

"Ease your mind." He tossed the whisky down, shuddering, and refilled the glass. "So you're to be my model? Two weeks, and I'll be like you?"

Since the poor fellow was not right in his mind, I refused to take offence. "I don't think—" I began, when he came over and clutched my elbow with his free hand.

"Kid," he said, "give it to me straight. What do you really think of the Dodgers this year?"

It wasn't a question I would have expected. "I don't follow baseball closely—football's my game. But aren't the Braves and the Giants—"

"Yah!" he snorted, turning away. I didn't anticipate my two weeks here would be fun; I expected, in fact, to earn what I was being paid; but the close company of a boor was even more objectionable than that of a lunatic. I always say it costs very little to be polite, whether you mean it or not.

He whirled around. "Typical of this side," he commented bitterly. "Brooklyn in fifth place. Fifth place—the second division! Satchel Paige retired and Walter Johnson forgotten. Lavagetto coaching in the bush leagues. Robinson selling Chock Full O' Nuts. Lies, lies! They spend all their time making them up. Do you know what?" He came closer, and whispered. "They even say Matisse is dead and Picasso hasn't given up painting for sculpture!"

For the first time it occurred to me—as it should have sooner—that he might become violent. And the room, more like that of a hotel than a hospital, had no bell to summon attendants, only a phone, and Wais was not far gone enough for me to scream through it for help. Yet his wild talk made me nervous. Brooklyn was in fifth place; Paige, Johnson, Lavagetto and Robinson were forgotten except by nostalgic

sportswriters. Matisse . . . Matisse . . . A painter; I was sure I'd read an obituary, and while I didn't go in for grotesque painting, I was pretty sure Picasso hadn't taken up sculpture.

I was relieved when they wheeled in a dumb-waiter with our dinner. There was service for three; Dr. Gayler joined us. Now we were in his hands his manner was less authoritative than placatory, as though he were wheedling us into liking him and making the experiment succeed. He chatted amiably, addressing us by our given names, which might have been confusing except that he called Wais "Robert" and me "Bob." He talked to me of utilities bonds, about which he seemed reasonably well-informed, until Wais showed signs of restlessness, whereupon he turned to him to discuss the music of Schoenberg.

Though this was clearly more to Wais's taste, he was restless, and it wasn't long before he threw himself back in his chair and said petulantly, "Let's get on with it, Doc. Give us the needle or put us in a trance, hand out the pills, or start the free association spinning."

Dr. Gayler looked pained. "Sorry you got the idea drugs or hypnosis were to be used. All I want you to do is relax and permit the empathic currents to flow between you. Let yourself look into Bob's mind."

Wais grunted. "X-rays or telepathy?"

"Call it osmosis if you like," said Gayler genially. "Just don't resist the process."

Wais picked up a book—poetry from the slimness of it—and throwing himself down on the couch, began reading.

Happily his discourtesy wasn't always so open. Or perhaps its scope depended on his moods, for the next day he acted very differently. "One day gone," he announced jovially; "only thirteen to go. Like being marooned on a desert island except we know when the rescue ship's coming. When I was a boy I thought it would be the ideal life, didn't you?"

"I was always too busy for day dreaming," I confessed. "I had a stamp collection, an erector set, model airplanes. And there were scouts and games and shows. And when I

ADJUSTMENT

went to high school I began selling magazine subscriptions and doing odd jobs. I was never what they used to call an introvert."

I was prepared for some sarcastic remark; instead he began asking personal questions, not rudely, but with genuine interest. His attention overcame my initial reticence; I soon found myself telling him about Mother, and the bank, and how Mr. McIlforth once said I had a natural flair for trust deeds. I'm afraid I went very close to the edge of good taste in mentioning Alice and our tentative agreement, contingent on so many factors that it was unlikely we would be able to marry for years.

He shuddered. "How can you stand it? Doing the same things, day after day?"

"They aren't the same things," I explained. "Each day is different, especially in the bank. It's not like a factory, where you repeat the identical operation over and over. It's a job full of new and rich experience. Every aspect of human nature is revealed to the man in the bank: hopes, ambitions, troubles, catastrophes; thrift, honesty, astuteness, courage . . ."

"You find all this in the complacent people who come in clutching their bankbooks and deposits. In the anxious, fawning seekers of loans?"

"Yes, because everyone comes to the bank. Plumbers and housewives, executives and clerks. Depositors and borrowers aren't a class apart: they're Everyman."

He shook his head. "You too can discover romance." He pondered for a moment. "And planning to spend the rest of your life with one woman."

"It's customary," I remarked with some irony.

"All is custom, as Herodotus said. If you were a Muslim it would be four."

"I think not. Debauchery is debauchery in any time or place. Just because something is legal or customary doesn't make it right."

"Hal! Where's your celebrated adjustment now?"

We didn't understand each other, as you can see. We had

little in common. Yet in spite of his eccentricities we got along fairly well. I could hardly approve of his habits or extremely controversial ideas, but apart from them I found him likeable in a way. I even tolerated his irrational aversion to television—there was supposed to be a set in our quarters, but he peremptorily ordered it out—and his distracting habit of listening to snippets of baseball broadcasts, always turning them off angrily when the behavior of the Brooklyn team or the decision of an umpire displeased him.

"Absurd!" he would rage.

"Well, there isn't much you can do about it."

He gave me a scornful look. "That's what you think." And he would leave the room abruptly.

I couldn't imagine where he went, for though the sanitarium resembled a good hotel, it provided no social recreation, no place where one guest could meet others. There was neither a communal dining room, a moving picture hall, nor other facilities for the gregarious. And he volunteered no information until the first week had passed. It was a particularly disastrous game for the Dodgers, who seemed to have done everything possible to deserve their alternate nickname except put in pinch hitters for their heaviest batters. Wais gave a disgusted click of the switch. "Deal or no deal, I'm going to listen where I can get a decent broadcast of a decent game."

I puzzled over that one. If he couldn't get what he wanted there it was hard to imagine where he could. The radio he'd substituted for the thirty-inch TV was one of those custom jobs that do everything but the laundry. It had AM, FM, shortwave and all possible bands; if there were Martian or Venerian broadcasts I'm sure it would have brought them in. And he had never mentioned any interest in cricket, lacrosse, jai-alai, or the esoteric sports of the Mysterious East. The more I thought of it, the less sense it made.

It was no use to tell myself I couldn't expect a mentally unbalanced individual to make sense. Because I had come, perhaps grudgingly, to learn that Robert Wais, for all his

ADJUSTMENT

odd poses and eccentricities, usually made sense of a sort. It might not be Mr. McIlforth's or Dr. Gayler's, but within his own frame of reference it was coherent and logical. I didn't particularly like him, nor was I sympathetic toward his moods, whims and notions. But in the peculiar atmosphere of close contact I had seen enough of him and talked with him sufficiently to come a long way from my snap judgment in Dr. Gayler's office that he was insane. Rude, brusque, moody, opinionated, out of step with everybody—certainly. But mad? I doubted it more all the time.

Yet the implications of his childish exclamations and exits were tantalizing. Where did he go? What did he do when he got there? Then, as though to aggravate my interest still further, on the ninth day of Dr. Gayler's "experiment"—I use quotes around the word simply because, so far as I could see, there was nothing more to it than just throwing us together—he muttered, "I'm fed up with this stuff; I'm in the mood for Fred Allen, or even Groucho Marx."

I can pick up a gag as quickly as the next man. "I wouldn't mind a half hour of Bob Hope myself," I said. "Unfortunately for us, Allen passed away, Hope's retired, and Marx isn't on the air Mondays."

"You do believe all the lies they tell you on this side, don't you? Maybe it makes you happy or something. Would I be happy to recapture that lost innocence and give up everything that makes life interesting?" He didn't wait for me to answer the rhetorical question.

A week earlier I would have shrugged it off as pure nonsense, but I had come to see a certain consistency in Wais's speech and actions. Perhaps he had tapes or records of some of the old comedians. Though, if he did, why not play them on the machine in the room? His reference to "lies on this side" could be dismissed readily enough; still . . .

Next afternoon he complained of a bad headache. I wasn't surprised: he had been drinking the night before; no matter what he said about the hair of the dog, common sense told

me more of the same wouldn't help. "Better take a rest," I suggested.

"Rest is all I get. I must have been out of my mind to come here. Anyway, I want to hear the Dodger-Red Sox game today."

It took me a moment to orient myself. "You mean the Dodger-Giant game. You had it on this morning, don't you remember? You shut it off in a huff when the Brooklyn pitcher was knocked out of the box. I got it back on after you left, and for your information, the Bums lost, nine to one."

He waved his arm. "Oh, that. I'm not going to listen to any more of those phony broadcasts."

Did he think—"Anyway, how could you hear a Brooklyn-Red Sox game? It isn't spring: no exhibition games. And they aren't in the same league, if you remember."

"I remember," he said. "There's nothing wrong with my memory."

"Well, then—" I began.

"Look: conversation makes me dizzy. Be a good fellow and run up and listen to the game. Tell me how it comes out."

"Run up where?"

He closed his eyes. "You'll find it."

My first impulse was to ignore him and retire with a copy of *Time* or *Coronet*. Naturally I was irritated. Cryptic remarks have much the same annoying effect as experimental poetry. Logic furnishes no key with which to puzzle them out. "It" could only refer to an electronic device but (leaving aside the question of why he would have installed it elsewhere) the bland assumption that I would find it "up there" (on the next floor, on the roof, in the sky?) was exasperating in its indefiniteness. Perhaps it was sheer annoyance that sent me forth; certainly I had no expectation of finding anything.

"Up" implied use of a stairway; beyond this, reason offered little help. Feeling somewhat foolish, and keeping an eye open for Dr. Gayler or one of the residents or nurses—

ADJUSTMENT

trusting a plausible explanation of my presence would pop into my head—I mounted the broad flight of steps which narrowed arbitrarily to a landing. I stared down a long hall at close-set, indistinguishable doors. On impulse I walked to the third on the right and turned the knob.

I cannot say the room I entered was dark. Neither was it light. Silly as it sounds, the only words I could think of to describe it were the Biblical ones: *"without form, and void."* There was one exception to the amorphousness, the vagueness of the room. There was a single focal point of clarity and distinctness at the opposite end, chest-high: a cabinet with dials and speakers, but no knobs.

"... now we come to the top of the Brooklyn batting order; Gil Hodges in the box, Snider on deck. Last of the seventh here at New Ebbets Field in this crucial game of the 1960 World Series. One out, Reese on first. Ruth winds up with his eye on the runner. The throw to first—not in time. Back on the mound; the pitch—low and inside: ball one. . . ."

A cumbersome joke; what for? The 1960 World Series wouldn't be played for more than three months, and the present standings of both Brooklyn and Boston ruled them out—except mathematically—as possible contestants. This imaginary broadcast, with the background sound effects of the crowd, must have been made by Wais for his amusement. Not for mine, certainly.

"... Reese takes a big lead off first. Here comes the pitch—foul! The count is—" The machine gave a click like a hiccup. *"This is not a record or a transcription of any kind; this is the actual voice of Red Barber, brought to you by the Gillette Safety Company. Men! Look sharp . . ."*

A silly business, though adding the last statement to the counterfeit was ingenious. And it was a pleasant fancy to introduce the old greats—all retired now, of course, except manager Reese—into the Brooklyn lineup; a touch of imagination to ignore the conversion of Ruth to an outfielder.

So this was where Wais spent his time. A strange place;

one most people wouldn't care for. Yet I could understand how it served as a refuge, a relief from the routine of the sanitarium and the limited imagination of Dr. Gayler. Not very comfortable, perhaps, with nothing to sit on—

Something nudged the calves of my legs. Startled, I turned. One of those wrought-iron and canvas moderne things was just behind me. How I had failed to see it before was a mystery. I sat down somewhat gingerly. If this was all there was, there was no use complaining.

I was still bothered by the unsubstantiality of the room. Surely there ought to be windows? I sniffed automatically: the air was fresh and temperate. Evidently a ventilating system of some kind was introducing, controlling and purifying the air, doing away with the necessity for windows. However, this didn't account for the absence of light, or of walls—

" . . . Ruth, head down, walks in from the mount. Grover Cleveland Alexander marches jauntily from the bullpen to see if he can . . . "

But there was light, I now noticed, a concealed, diffused light, without glare or the yellow or blue quality of any artificial light I knew. As for walls, there were—no, there *was* a wall. A single wall, for the room, a large, in fact an enormous one, was circular in shape. I didn't care for it, though I know such a form is, at least theoretically, more economical and efficient. The wall gave it a solidity I welcomed; there is nothing more confusing than a room which seems to stretch out into endless space. There was a ceiling too, I realized, but as I looked up at it I felt my face reddening. I'm not excessively squeamish, but what I saw painted there, the nymphs and satyrs, gods and goddesses, shepherds and shepherdesses, was so frankly erotic and lascivious that I quickly looked down from the signature, "*J. Fragonard, pinxit.*" to the floor, which I now perceived was covered by a tapestry carpet repeating the same indecent themes.

There was no question the room represented Wais's sensual and decadent tastes. Pictures, hung on flat projections from

ADJUSTMENT

the round wall, were the kind any kindergarten child—but no; any child of any age would have more restraint.

Except for the space occupied by the radio and an extensive bar stocked with bottles of varying sizes and shapes, brands I never saw on billboards or the backs of magazines, the rest of the wall was taken up by books, no two uniform. One would think that in collecting a large library space would be given to sets of standard authors in good-looking bindings, but there were none.

“ . . . Crack! Did you hear it? Campanella connected with that one! Hodges is coming in to score; Snider’s rounding third; Robinson’s already passed second . . . ”

I walked over to the bookcases. *Sophia Scarlett*, by Stevenson; *The Real Life of Rumbold Raysting*, by Dickens; *Left at Home*, by Ring Lardner; Douglas Freeman’s *Calhoun*—books assuredly never sponsored by any book club. Where had he gotten such curiosities? Why bring them to the sanitarium?

A door, not the one by which I had entered, opened. Through it came a ravishing young woman—I speak impersonally, as a matter of esthetics—clothed in a veil hiding nothing whatever. Her full, wide mouth smiled in a manner at once timid and inviting.

“Lord!” she exclaimed; “my heart beats again, now that you are here once more. Your lovesick slave is overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for your return.” To my embarrassment, she threw herself to the carpet at my feet, twining her arms around my ankles.

I recovered my balance, if not my assurance. “There must be some mistake, Miss. I’m afraid I haven’t the pleasure of knowing you—”

“Oh, my lord, my beloved, my master,” she wailed, without releasing her grip or raising her face. “What have I done to displease you? What is my fault that I no longer find favor in your sight? Oh beat me, hurt me—but do not deny me.”

“Please, Miss,” I mumbled; “there’s a misunderstanding

somewhere. Believe me, I—Come now, get up. You must be uncomfortable like that. There are always drafts on the floor. Let me introduce myself: I'm Robert—"

"Of course you are Robert, my life. Could you think your miserable Ariadne had forgotten you? Even though you act so strange and cold? Oh, master, take me back again—"

" . . . And so that packs up another World Series for the World Champion Brooklyn Club. There will be joy in Flatbush, Bushwick, Greenpoint and even Canarsie tonight . . . "

I felt this was intrusive at the moment. "How do you turn that thing off?" I asked. "Or at least get it on to something else?"

"Aren't you happy the Dodgers won, my king?"

"I don't give a da—excuse me, I mean I don't care one way or the other. It's all a rib. You, too; I suppose you work in a nightclub. Though I didn't think they wore this sort of thing even there."

Her cry was pure distress, which she didn't corrupt with tears. "I'll take it off, master; I'll wear nothing that offends you." And she began to do so.

"No, no," I objected quickly. "Keep it on. You might get chilled. Haven't you got anything a little more—ah—opaque to put on top of it?"

"Anything my liege fancies," she answered. "A sarong?"

"I was thinking of something more in the way of a dress, or a—you know—housecoat, or . . . or . . ."

The radio (or whatever it was) was, *"This is a recording of the Mozart Forty-fourth Piano Concerto, K723; the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Arthur Nikisch; the solo part by Hans von Bülow."*

"A housecoat!" cried Ariadne. "Truly I have become hideous in your eyes. And what of your other slaves and concubines?"

"My—Good heavens! Are there more of you?"

"You are joking, lord. The thought of Phyllis, Daphne, Chloe, Iphigenia and Leda brightens your eyes."

ADJUSTMENT

Six concubines! Bluebeard, no less. "You better send them away," I said.

She looked up at me, utter shock on her lovely face. "You would condemn them to death?"

"What? You mean they'd die away from here?"

"They—or I—would die away from you, light of our world. Naturally."

Being accountable for the lives of six young women—at least I assumed they must be young—was a new and frightening responsibility. For the first time since I entered the circular room I was tempted to turn back. But if I did, Wais would continue to tempt these creatures into a life of depravity. The least I could do was counteract his influence.

"Where are they?"

"Why, awaiting your pleasure, master. Will you sport with us in the pool?"

"Certainly not!" Bathing suits would be more respectable than what Ariadne was wearing, but by now I was ready to believe they might be considered superfluous around here. "Pool? On the third floor of a sanitarium?"

"I don't know why you speak and act so strangely, lord; but since it is your will it is mine also. And if I have become repulsive, the others may still gladden you."

What was the use of trying to explain to the poor girl that I was no fiend, but a normal and—at least informally—an engaged man? I followed her through the doorway into another and even bigger room, round like the first, except for two moon-shaped bites out of its sides to accommodate other circular rooms. It too was indirectly lit and air-conditioned; most of its area was taken up by a turquoise pool formed like a figure 8.

I hesitate to mention this for fear of being misunderstood, but it was a different set of figures which held my eye. As I had uneasily anticipated, the other five had less on than Ariadne. A great deal less. They were unqualifiedly naked.

What startled me more than their unclad state was their diversity. Ariadne's eyes were the color of the pool; her hair

was like rust in the sun; her body—as I couldn't help observing—had the delicate luster of old parchment, except that it was warm and glowing. Leda—I soon learned their names as they clung to me, entreating me to favor them with my smile—was deep, dark brown, the tint and texture of a bronze iris in the shade. Chloe was Chinese; perfectly formed, exquisite, vivacious. There was no doubt about Iphigenia's being a Eurasian, with the delicate complexion and faultless features of the Malay predominating. Blonde Daphne belied the vacuity the word so often implies; black-haired, dark-eyed Phyllis—languid, magnificent—was frightening.

They clustered about me, laughing, teasing, cajoling. Phyllis knelt to untie my shoes, hiding them in a deluge of rippling hair. Leda struggled with my jacket; Chloe removed my tie and unbuttoned my shirt; Iphigenia and Daphne busied themselves also. Their intention was only too clear; they expected me to join them in the water—without swimming trunks.

"Ladies, wait!" I gasped. "I—I don't care for this sort of thing. Honestly."

Their beautiful faces fell. "Lord," pleaded Daphne, "are you tired of us?"

No one could have been cruel enough to answer yes. Besides, it would have been inaccurate; how could I be tired of them when we had just met? "No, no—certainly not. I'm just not in the mood for swimming at the moment."

Leda kissed my ear and whispered something in it which made me jump. Hesitantly Ariadne made a still more scandalous suggestion; I'm sure she could not have realized its outrageousness; Chloe clapped her hands: "I know—you would like a drink."

"If you mean alcohol," I said, retying my tie, "I would not. However, if there is some Coca-Cola round here . . ."

They surveyed each other with questioning dismay. Iphigenia repeated, "Co-ca-co-la?"

"A harmless and refreshing beverage." I shook my head at their ignorance. "I see there isn't. Never mind; it's all right."

ADJUSTMENT

"Our king must have whatever he wishes," exclaimed Ariadne.

"Please don't bother," I said, discomposed at their eagerness to serve me.

"Master, we exist only to do your bidding," insisted Leda. "If we cannot satisfy your wants, we have no purpose."

"Here is your co-ca-co-la, liege," murmured Chloe, casting down her eyes after giving me what I can only describe as a shattering look.

And to be sure, there was the familiar pinch-waisted bottle on a tray in her hands. I drank it gratefully, though it was warm, not wishing to hurt them with criticism; almost immediately Phyllis appeared with another bottle, obviously refrigerated, accompanied by a glass half-full of ice cubes.

They were so overjoyed at this success in catering to my inclination that they became quite unrestrained. I regret to say they tried to drag me into the next room, a glimpse of which I caught through the opened door. It too was round. Mirror-walled and -ceiled, it gave back an infinite number of images of a circular bed, heaped high with pillows in the center. I could not allow myself to speculate on their designs.

"Ladies," I said firmly, "if we are to be friends, and continue to enjoy these accommodations together—or more accurately, at the same time—we must come to an understanding. I'm sure, in your natural innocence, you don't realize how this scene would look to an outsider. Evil to him who evil thinks, of course, but why give even the appearance of evil?"

"But there is no one to see," Leda pointed out.

"All the more reason for discretion," I said. "If we did what was right only while people were watching, what would the world come to?"

Phyllis' eyes filled with tears; her regal head drooped. "What have we done wrong, lord? Tell us, so we may avoid offending you."

She looked so pitiful that I began to reach out with a brotherly pat of reassurance. But the sudden light in her eyes was so far from being sisterly that I was able to recollect

her lack of attire in time, and draw back before touching the bare shoulder. "You haven't done anything wrong. Nothing at all. Simply as a matter of—ah—decorum, I think we ought to make some changes around here."

Daphne said, "Your wish is our law."

This was a trifle undemocratic but not entirely disagreeable. After all, they were lucky to have someone like myself, instead of an unstable character who would take advantage of them. "Let's begin then, by putting on suitable clothing; the common cold is a menace. And I do think you'll be more comfortable in bathing suits when you use the pool. And we can be perfectly friendly without excessive physical contact. Really, that's all. Oh—except possibly it might be better (this is just a suggestion) if you did up your hair, or perhaps cut it short. It seems so—mmm—*abandoned*, hanging down loose like that."

Ariadne, whom I somehow hadn't missed, suddenly reappeared. The transformation left me breathless. She had not accepted my advice about a housecoat; instead she wore slacks and a sweater, both tight. Her hair was piled up, with a few curls spilling down over one ear and cheek. And she carried the delicious odor of good perfume instead of the distracting natural scents which had been perceptible earlier. "Does this content my liege?" she asked modestly.

I tried to be entirely objective. "It's a great improvement. Perhaps, though, if you were to wear a girdle and bra . . ."

"Master," repeated Daphne tragically, "your wish is our law."

I retreated to the first room, leaving them to their privacy. There was a big moral problem involved. I could take care of the comparatively simple matter of seeing that we did nothing disgraceful, but their evident passion for me was something else again. It hardly seemed fair to torment them with my constant presence when nothing could come of it, yet Ariadne had said that to banish them would be to destroy them. It was a dilemma. If only there were not six of them. *Six . . .!*

Shaking my head, I absently pulled a book from the shelves,

Novel Three, by Henry Roth, and let the pages run under my thumb. I really haven't time to read many books, and what I have can't be wasted on fiction. I understand writers are paid by the word, so it's only natural for them to turn out as many as possible; for the busy man, practical publishers hire specialists to reduce them to compact form. I put *Novel Three* back on the shelf, and picked up the thin volume next to it. It was *Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, condensed by Somerset Maugham, a neat hundred pages of large type. I promised myself I would certainly dip into it someday.

Phyllis entered, rather subdued. I was delighted to see she had not only cut her hair and put on clothes, but had taken my hint about foundation garments. Generously proportioned women like Phyllis particularly need such restraints. "You look very nice," I complimented.

I'm afraid I spoke with more enthusiasm than I intended, or else she misinterpreted my tone. I was forced to explain that what she took for granted as the inevitable consequence of my polite remark was both licentious and illicit. I had to insist my preference for clothes was not a matter of their putting them on for me to take off.

Paradoxically, I felt like a brute. She finally dried her eyes and murmured, "Master, may we serve you food?"

I was relieved by the change of subject. "Food? Good idea. What have you got?"

"Anything you fancy, lord. Ortolans drowned in brandy; nightingales' tongues with truffles stewed in port; breast of pheasant in aspic; brook trout à la—"

"What about a nice thick steak? And french fries?"

"Yes, lord," she assented dutifully.

It seemed hardly a minute before they all came in with the sizzling porterhouse on a smoking platter. They set it down on a table I hadn't noticed earlier, which, I'm glad to say, was a sensible piece of furniture resting on solid legs, not a mobile captured in flight and domesticated. Iphigenia, her finely molded nostrils dilating over the savory aroma, cut the steak into bite-size bits before I could protest I wasn't a child.

Leda took them up and put them in my mouth. Chloe did the same service with the french fries, the golden brown of the potatoes blending with the paler gold of her fingers; Ariadne wiped my lips with a delicately fragrant napkin. I felt slightly ridiculous at first, but the food was good—very tender, not highly seasoned, well salted—and the attention was not unpleasant. After all, there isn't anything wrong in being fed by a group of charming girls. Especially since they were now all decently attired.

I unobtrusively let my belt out a notch. Good nourishing food never hurt anyone, but it would be wise to exercise regularly. One of the things this place needed was a rowing machine or similar apparatus, so I could take daily workouts. Another, unquestionably, was a TV screen in addition to the oddly made radio. Come to think of it, there was one right above it, after all.

"Well, ladies," I said jovially, "I think we owe ourselves some recreation. Let's have fun."

They beamed on me, and some of their former enthusiasm returned. Daphne blew me a kiss.

"No, no. You misunderstand me. I mean entertainment. A show or a prize fight, or something like that."

The TV screen lit up; the muscular voice of Milton Cross announced the presentation of *Il Re Lear*, second in a cycle of Verdi works which would include *Fedra*, *Tartuffe*, and others. There was an overture which I thought rather noisy and then a group of people disguised in thoroughly undeceptive costumes began to sing. I'm not one of those who sneer at either art or opera, but there's a time and place for everything. "This isn't what I call amusement," I grumbled.

There was a great flutter of agitation among the girls. I had a passing wonder whether Alice would ever take so deep and unselfish an interest in making me contented.

The TV screen went into a nervous tizzy of wavy lines. "I'd rather see a good football game," I said, quite aware of the absurdity of the whim, since it was the baseball season.

The screen straightened out as though whacked swiftly.

ADJUSTMENT

"—fect football weather; crisp and clear. Notre Dame will defend the west goal. Captain George Gipp's having a last word with Coaches Rockne and Leahy now. Ready for the kickoff; backfield for Paul Brown's All-Stars: Otto Graham at quarter; Jim Thorpe and Red Grange at the halfback spots; Bronko Nagurski at full. It's a long end-over-end boot that bounces on the five, taken by Grange, the Galloping Ghost, behind his own goal line . . ."

This was the real thing: rough, hard, vital. I settled down comfortably—the functional oddity had given way to a nice, homey, upholstered batwing—and enjoyed myself. Ariadne and Leda leaned over the top of the chair, Daphne and Iphigenia perched on the arms, Chloe and Phyllis sat at my feet. It was all very cosy.

" . . . the five, picks up his interference, crosses the ten, the fifteen, helped by a beautiful block from Nagurski, on the seventeen, sidesteps a man on the twenty, the twenty-five, and still moving at the thirty, he might go all the way . . ."

After the game I taught them gin rummy—Chloe proved particularly adept and was almost as good as I—and we had a gay evening. Perhaps the only drag on my mood was the architecture and furnishings of that circular room, with its nasty ceiling and carpet and all those useless books, all so unsuitable to the sensible, harmless game.

Most annoying was that the place could have been so attractive if it hadn't been designed to flaunt its differences, its eccentricities, its abnormalities. I sketched out in my mind a plan for far less radical living quarters. I'm no architect, but anyone who has observed gracious homes or compact dwellings can combine the best points of what he has seen without plunging into wild, untested experiments just to prove his taste is more advanced than the accepted standard.

I had barely mentally remodeled to my satisfaction when I saw that the oversized room was actually divided up into a convenient apartment with honest corners showing their uncompromising right angles. The girls were enchanted by the improvement (as they had every reason to be) and foll-

owed me, giggling and admiring, on a quick tour of inspection. The bedroom was cheerful and neat, certainly not voluptuous; a three-quarter bed, a chest of drawers with Mother's picture on it, a TV screen where the wall and ceiling met, a magazine rack stocked with *Nation's Business*, *Kiplinger's*, and other useful periodicals, a bright flower print to cheer things up, and a few other homelike odds and ends.

There was a bathroom with a shower, an efficient-looking kitchen which I didn't anticipate using often since the girls' feelings might be hurt if I didn't allow them to provide the meals, and a snug living room with an overstuffed set and a contour chair; bridge and table lamps scattered around instead of concealed fixtures. On top of the TV, now reduced to manageable proportions, a clever combination light and planter was both ornamental and useful as the soft glow fell on the splayed leaves of a well-tended ficus. The floor was carpeted wall-to-wall with flowered broadloom and the ceiling was relievingly bare. There were no distorted Picassos or Modiglianis on the stippled walls, but a group of understandable paintings by Norman Rockwell and N. C. Wyeth. It was the sort of atmosphere where a man could stretch out and forget his cares.

There was also a lock on the door leading to the girls' quarters. A little to my surprise, they did not struggle very hard when I asked them to go, and snapped the latch after them. Oh, Phyllis pouted, Leda tried to hold on to my hands, and Daphne pretended she had lost one of her high-heeled shoes, but in the end I secured my privacy without too much difficulty. In fact, it was so easy I was struck with sudden suspicion. Sure enough, when I switched on the bedroom light, there was Ariadne with the covers pulled up over her head, making believe to be sound asleep.

Her attachment to me was understandable, but she is too nice a girl to go in for that sort of thing. I'm not immune to impulse myself, but my self-respect, particularly in the presence of Mother's picture, helped me not to do anything either of us would be sorry for later. After alternately explaining and

ADJUSTMENT

coaxing, I finally convinced her that I didn't find her repulsive or ugly or any of the things she concluded must account for my self-control.

After she was gone I sank down into the contour chair. One thing I had to admit: it was convenient to control the TV from across the room, without fiddling with knobs. I got a very unusual program of whirling, changing pastel colors accompanied by soothing music. I thought of making myself a cup of coffee, but I didn't want to be overstimulated and kept awake.

I went to the wall-safe and glanced in at the piles of stock and bond certificates, the bundles of greenbacks, and the bags of coin. Perhaps it was childish of me to take out a canvas sack and let the freshly minted pieces run through my fingers, but it was pleasant. Not at all like handling other people's money in the bank. I was aroused from my revery by an authoritative knock on the door.

Aroused, not startled nor disturbed. It was not the girls' door, but the one leading to the sanitarium. The door was permanently closed where I was concerned. "Bob! Bob Squith! Come out." It was Dr. Gayler's voice.

"No, thanks," I answered lightly. "I'm quite satisfied."

Vehemence replaced urgency. "Bob! You don't belong there. This is an unfortunate, unforeseen development. You can't be happy there; you're too well adjusted to the real world."

Real world? Philosophers have been arguing over the nature of reality for centuries, yet he had undertaken to settle the question. The man was an idiot. What could be more real than the chair in which I was lying back, or the heavy sack in my lap? "Thanks, Doctor. I'm all right."

"Listen," he importuned, "can you hear me?"

"Of course I can hear you. There's nothing wrong with my faculties."

"Certainly there isn't. You were just upset by the strain of close association with Wais. And evidently the transference worked both ways, something quite unexpected. Incidentally, he is adjusting beautifully."

"Glad to hear it," I yawned. "Maybe Mr. McIlforth will give him my old job at the bank."

"Come out now," he begged. "The longer you stay the harder it will be to reach you."

I remember Wais's vexation at being tormented by their nagging. Apparently it was going to be better for me. "That's fine," I said.

"This experience has been hard on you," he went on. "Naturally psychiatric attention will be free. And I'll see to it you get a bonus. A good bonus."

"What do I want with a bonus?" I asked, flipping a gold double-eagle into the air and catching it skilfully. "I never had it so good."

After a long time he went away. I suppose he will come back, but it doesn't matter; I have more stamina than most people. I returned the coins to the safe and got ready for bed. Perhaps—if I can get in touch with Alice and she releases me from our understanding—I shall marry Ariadne. Except that I worry over making the other girls miserable. Especially Phyllis. And Daphne. Maybe things are better the way they are, in fact.

Let well enough alone, I always say.

BERTRAM CHANDLER

Here is a Challenge-to-the-Reader story, a stimulating puzzle for you to solve: How could you prove to a wholly alien life-form that you are a rational being? To the survivors of the wrecked spaceship Lode Star it was a challenge of a more vital sort—a riddle of life or death. I doubt if any reader will soon forget Mr. Chandler's pointed answer.

THE CAGE

IMPRISONMENT IS always a humiliating experience, no matter how philosophical the prisoner. Imprisonment by one's own kind is bad enough—but one can, at least, talk to one's captors, one can make one's wants understood; one can, on occasion, appeal to them man to man.

Imprisonment is doubly humiliating when one's captors, in all honesty, treat one as a lower animal.

The party from the survey ship could, perhaps, be excused for failing to recognize the survivors from the interstellar liner *Lode Star* as rational beings. At least two hundred days had passed since their landing on the planet without a name—an unintentional landing made when *Lode Star's* Ehrenhaft generators, driven far in excess of their normal capacity by a breakdown of the electronic regulator, had flung her far from the regular shipping lanes to an unexplored region of Space. *Lode Star* had landed safely enough;

but shortly thereafter (troubles never come singly) her Pile had got out of control and her Captain had ordered his First Mate to evacuate the passengers and such crew members not needed to cope with the emergency, and to get them as far from the ship as possible.

Hawkins and his charges were well clear when there was a flare of released energy, a not very violent explosion. The survivors wanted to turn to watch, but Hawkins drove them on with curses and, at times, blows. Luckily they were up wind from the ship and so escaped the fall-out.

When the fireworks seemed to be over Hawkins, accompanied by Dr. Boyle, the ship's surgeon, returned to the scene of the disaster. The two men, wary of radioactivity, were cautious and stayed a safe distance from the shallow, still smoking crater that marked where the ship had been. It was all too obvious to them that the Captain, together with his officers and technicians, was now no more than an infinitesimal part of the incandescent cloud that had mushroomed up into the low overcast.

Thereafter the fifty-odd men and women, the survivors of *Lode Star*, had degenerated. It hadn't been a fast process—Hawkins and Boyle, aided by a committee of the more responsible passengers, had fought a stout rearguard action. But it had been a hopeless sort of fight. The climate was against them, for a start. Hot it was, always in the neighborhood of 85° Fahrenheit. And it was wet—a thin, warm drizzle falling all the time. The air seemed to abound with the spores of fungi—luckily these did not attack living skin but thrived on dead organic matter, on clothing. They thrived to an only slightly lesser degree on metals and on the synthetic fabrics that many of the castaways wore.

Danger, outside danger, would have helped to maintain morale. But there were no dangerous animals. There were only little smooth-skinned things, not unlike frogs, that hopped through the sodden undergrowth, and, in the numerous rivers, fishlike creatures ranging in size from the shark to the tadpole, and all of them possessing the bellicosity of the latter.

Food had been no problem after the first few hungry hours. Volunteers had tried a large, succulent fungus growing on the boles of the huge fern-like trees. They had pronounced it good. After a lapse of five hours they had neither died nor even complained of abdominal pains. That fungus was to become the staple diet of the castaways. In the weeks that followed other fungi had been found, and berries, and roots—all of them edible. They provided a welcome variety.

Fire—in spite of the all-pervading heat—was the blessing most missed by the castaways. With it they could have supplemented their diet by catching and cooking the little frog-things of the rain forest, the fishes of the streams. Some of the hardier spirits did eat these animals raw, but they were frowned upon by most of the other members of the community. Too, fire would have helped to drive back the darkness of the long nights, would, by its real warmth and light, have dispelled the illusion of cold produced by the ceaseless dripping of water from every leaf and frond.

When they fled from the ship most of the survivors had possessed pocket lighters—but the lighters had been lost when the pockets, together with the clothing surrounding them, had disintegrated. In any case, all attempts to start a fire in the days when there were still pocket lighters had failed—there was not, Hawkins swore, a single dry spot on the whole accursed planet. Now the making of fire was quite impossible: even if there had been present an expert on the rubbing together of two dry sticks he could have found no material with which to work.

They made their permanent settlement on the crest of a low hill. (There were, so far as they could discover, no mountains.) It was less thickly wooded there than the surrounding plains, and the ground was less marshy underfoot. They succeeded in wrenching fronds from the fern-like trees and built for themselves crude shelters—more for the sake of privacy than for any comfort that they afforded. They clung, with a certain desperation, to the governmental forms of the worlds that they had left, and elected themselves a council.

Boyle, the ship's surgeon, was their chief. Hawkins, rather to his surprise, was returned as a council member by a majority of only two votes—on thinking it over he realized that many of the passengers must still bear a grudge against the ship's executive staff for their present predicament.

The first council meeting was held in a hut—if so it could be called—especially constructed for the purpose. The council members squatted in a rough circle. Boyle, the president, got slowly to his feet. Hawkins grinned wryly as he compared the surgeon's nudity with the pomposity that he seemed to have assumed with his elected rank, as he compared the man's dignity with the unkempt appearance presented by his uncut, uncombed gray hair, his uncombed and straggling gray beard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Boyle.

Hawkins looked around him at the naked, pallid bodies, at the stringy, lusterless hair, the long, dirty fingernails of the men and the unpainted lips of the women. He thought, I don't suppose I look much like an officer and a gentleman myself.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Boyle, "we have been, as you know, elected to represent the human community upon this planet. I suggest that at this, our first meeting, we discuss our chances of survival—not as individuals, but as a race—"

"I'd like to ask Mr. Hawkins what our chances are of being picked up," shouted one of the two women members, a dried-up, spinsterish creature with prominent ribs and vertebrae.

"Slim," said Hawkins. "As you know, no communication is possible with other ships, or with planet stations when the Interstellar Drive is operating. When we snapped out of the Drive and came in for our landing we sent out a distress call—but we couldn't say where we were. Furthermore, we don't know that the call was received—"

"Miss Taylor," said Boyle huffily, "Mr. Hawkins, I would remind you that I am the duly elected president of this council. There will be time for a general discussion later.

"As most of you may already have assumed, the age of this planet, biologically speaking, corresponds roughly with that of Earth during the Carboniferous Era. As we already know, no species yet exists to challenge our supremacy. By the time such a species does emerge—something analogous to the giant lizards of Earth's Triassic Era—we should be well established—"

"We shall be dead!" called one of the men.

"We shall be dead," agreed the doctor, "but our descendants will be very much alive. We have to decide how to give them as good a start as possible. Language we shall bequeath to them—"

"Never mind the language, Doc," called the other woman member. She was a small blonde, slim, with a hard face. "It's just this question of descendants that I'm here to look after. I represent the women of childbearing age—there are, as you must know, fifteen of us here. So far the girls have been very, very careful. We have reason to be. Can you, as a medical man, guarantee—bearing in mind that you have no drugs, no instruments—safe deliveries? Can you guarantee that our children will have a good chance of survival?"

Boyle dropped his pomposity like a worn-out garment.

"I'll be frank," he said. "I have not, as you, Miss Hart, have pointed out, either drugs or instruments. But I can assure you, Miss Hart, that your chances of a safe delivery are far better than they would have been on Earth during, say, the Eighteenth Century. And I'll tell you why. On this planet, so far as we know (and we have been here long enough now to find out the hard way), there exist no microorganisms harmful to Man. Did such organisms exist, the bodies of those of us still surviving would be, by this time, mere masses of suppuration. Most of us, of course, would have died of septicemia long ago. And that, I think, answers *both* your questions."

"I haven't finished yet," she said. "Here's another point. There are fifty-three of us here, men and women. There are ten married couples—so we'll count them out. That leaves

thirty-three people, of whom twenty are men. Twenty men to thirteen (aren't we girls always unlucky?) women. All of us aren't young—but we're all of us women. What sort of marriage set-up do we have? Monogamy? Polyandry?"

"Monogamy, of course," said a tall, thin man sharply. He was the only one of those present who wore clothing—if so it could be called. The disintegrating fronds lashed around his waist with a strand of vine did little to serve any useful purpose.

"All right, then," said the girl. "Monogamy. I'd rather prefer it that way myself. But I warn you that if that's the way we play it there's going to be trouble. And in any murder involving passion and jealousy the woman is as liable to be a victim as either of the men—and I don't want *that*."

"What do you propose, then, Miss Hart?" asked Boyle.

"Just this, Doc. When it comes to our matings we leave love out of it. If two men want to marry the same woman, then let them fight it out. The best man gets the girl—and keeps her."

"Natural selection . . ." murmured the surgeon. "I'm in favor—but we must put it to the vote."

At the crest of the low hill was a shallow depression, a natural arena. Round the rim sat the castaways—all but four of them. One of the four was Dr. Boyle—he had discovered that his duties as president embraced those of a referee; it had been held that he was best competent to judge when one of the contestants was liable to suffer permanent damage. Another of the four was the girl Mary Hart. She had found a serrated twig with which to comb her long hair, she had contrived a wreath of yellow flowers with which to crown the victor. Was it, wondered Hawkins as he sat with the other council members, a hankering after an Earthly wedding ceremony, or was it a harking back to something older and darker?

"A pity that these blasted molds got our watches," said the fat man on Hawkins' right. "If we had any means of

telling the time we could have rounds, make a proper prize-fight of it."

Hawkins nodded. He looked at the four in the center of the arena—at the strutting, barbaric woman, at the pompous old man, at the two dark-bearded young men with their glistening white bodies. He knew them both—Fennet had been a Senior Cadet of the ill-fated *Lode Star*; Clemens, at least seven years Fennet's senior, was a passenger, had been a prospector on the frontier worlds.

"If we had anything to bet with," said the fat man happily, "I'd lay it on Clemens. That cadet of yours hasn't a snow-ball's chance in hell. He's been brought up to fight clean—Clemens has been brought up to fight dirty."

"Fennet's in better condition," said Hawkins. "He's been taking exercise, while Clemens has just been lying around sleeping and eating. Look at the paunch on him!"

"There's nothing wrong with good healthy flesh and muscle," said the fat man, patting his own paunch.

"No gouging, no biting!" called the doctor. "And may the best man win!"

He stepped back smartly away from the contestants, stood with the Hart woman.

There was an air of embarrassment about the pair of them as they stood there, each with his fists hanging at his sides. Each seemed to be regretting that matters had come to such a pass.

"Go on!" screamed Mary Hart at last. "Don't you want me? You'll live to a ripe old age here—and it'll be lonely with no woman!"

"They can always wait around until your daughters grow up, Mary!" shouted one of her friends.

"If I ever have any daughters!" she called. "I shan't at this rate!"

"Go on!" shouted the crowd. "Go on!"

Fennet made a start. He stepped forward almost diffidently, dabbed with his right fist at Clemens' unprotected face. It wasn't a hard blow, but it must have been painful. Clemens

put his hand up to his nose, brought it away and stared at the bright blood staining it. He growled, lumbered forward with arms open to hug and crush. The cadet danced back, scoring twice more with his right.

"Why doesn't he *hit* him?" demanded the fat man.

"And break every bone in his fist? They aren't wearing gloves, you know," said Hawkins.

Fennet decided to make a stand. He stood firm, his feet slightly apart, and brought his right into play once more. This time he left his opponent's face alone, went for his belly instead. Hawkins was surprised to see that the prospector was taking the blows with apparent equanimity—he must be, he decided, much tougher in actuality than in appearance.

The cadet sidestepped smartly . . . and slipped on the wet grass. Clemens fell heavily on to his opponent; Hawkins could hear the *whoosh* as the air was forced from the lad's lungs. The prospector's thick arms encircled Fennet's body—and Fennet's knee came up viciously to Clemens' groin. The prospector squealed, but hung on grimly. One of his hands was around Fennet's throat now, and the other one, its fingers viciously hooked, was clawing for the cadet's eyes.

"No gouging!" Boyle was screaming. "No gouging!"

He dropped down to his knees, caught Clemens' thick wrist with both his hands.

Something made Hawkins look up then. It may have been a sound, although this is doubtful; the spectators were behaving like boxing fans at a prizefight. They could hardly be blamed—this was the first piece of real excitement that had come their way since the loss of the ship. It may have been a sound that made Hawkins look up, it may have been the sixth sense possessed by all good spacemen. What he saw made him cry out.

Hovering above the arena was a helicopter. There was something about the design of it, a subtle oddness, that told Hawkins that this was no Earthly machine. Suddenly, from its smooth, shining belly, dropped a net, seemingly of dull

metal. It enveloped the struggling figures on the ground, trapped the doctor and Mary Hart.

Hawkins shouted again—a wordless cry. He jumped to his feet, ran to the assistance of his ensnared companions. The net seemed to be alive. It twisted itself around his wrists, bound his ankles. Others of the castaways rushed to aid Hawkins.

“Keep away!” he shouted. “Scatter!”

The low drone of the helicopter’s rotors rose in pitch. The machine lifted. In an incredibly short space of time the arena was to the First Mate’s eyes no more than a pale green saucer in which little white ants scurried aimlessly. Then the flying machine was above and through the base of the low clouds, and there was nothing to be seen but drifting whiteness.

When, at last, it made its descent Hawkins was not surprised to see the silvery tower of a great spaceship standing among the low trees on a level plateau.

The world to which they were taken would have been a marked improvement on the world they had left had it not been for the mistaken kindness of their captors. The cage in which the three men housed duplicated, with remarkable fidelity, the climatic conditions of the planet upon which *Lode Star* had been lost. It was glassed in, and from sprinklers in its roof fell a steady drizzle of warm water. A couple of dispirited tree ferns provided little shelter from the depressing precipitation. Twice a day a hatch at the back of the cage, which was made of a sort of concrete, opened, and slabs of a fungus remarkably similar to that on which they had been subsisting were thrown in. There was a hole in the floor of the cage; this the prisoners rightly assumed was for sanitary purposes.

On either side of them were other cages. In one of them was Mary Hart—alone. She could gesture to them, wave to them, and that was all. The cage on the other side held a beast built on the same general lines as a lobster, but with

a strong hint of squid. Across the broad roadway they could see other cages, but could not see what they housed.

Hawkins, Boyle and Fennet sat on the damp floor and stared through the thick glass and the bars at the beings outside who stared at them.

"If only they were humanoid," sighed the doctor. "If only they were the same shape as we are we might make a start towards convincing them that we, too, are intelligent beings."

"They aren't the same shape," said Hawkins. "And we, were the situations reversed, would take some convincing that three six-legged beer barrels were men and brothers. . . . Try Pythagoras' Theorem again," he said to the cadet.

Without enthusiasm the youth broke fronds from the nearest tree fern. He broke them into smaller pieces, then on the mossy floor laid them out in the design of a right-angled triangle with squares constructed on all three sides. The natives—a large one, one slightly smaller and a little one—regarded him incuriously with their flat, dull eyes. The large one put the tip of a tentacle into a pocket—the things wore clothing—and pulled out a brightly colored packet, handed it to the little one. The little one tore off the wrapping, started stuffing pieces of some bright blue confection into the slot on its upper side that, obviously, served it as a mouth.

"I wish they were allowed to feed the animals," sighed Hawkins. "I'm sick of that damned fungus."

"Let's recapitulate," said the doctor. "After all, we've nothing else to do. We were taken from our camp by the helicopter—six of us. We were taken to the survey ship—a vessel that seemed in no way superior to our own interstellar ships. You assure us, Hawkins, that the ship used the Ehrenhaft Drive or something so near to it as to be its twin brother. . . ."

"Correct," agreed Hawkins.

"On the ship we're kept in separate cages. There's no ill treatment, we're fed and watered at frequent intervals. We land on this strange planet, but we see nothing of it. We're hustled out of cages like so many cattle into a covered van. We know that we're being driven *somewhere*, that's all. The

THE CAGE

van stops, the door opens and a couple of these animated beer barrels poke in poles with smaller editions of those fancy nets on the end of them. They catch Clemens and Miss Taylor, drag them out. We never see them again. The rest of us spend the night and the following day and night in individual cages. The next day we're taken to this . . . zoo . . ."

"Do you think they were vivisected?" asked Fennet. "I never liked Clemens, but . . ."

"I'm afraid they were," said Boyle. "Our captors must have learned of the difference between the sexes by it. Unluckily there's no way of determining intelligence by vivisection—"

"The filthy brutes!" shouted the cadet.

"Easy, son," counseled Hawkins. "You can't blame them, you know. We've vivisected animals a lot more like us than we are to these things."

"The problem," the doctor went on, "is to convince these things—as you call them, Hawkins—that we are rational beings like themselves. How would they define a rational being? How would *we* define a rational being?"

"Somebody who knows Pythagoras' Theorem," said the cadet sulkily.

"I read somewhere," said Hawkins, "that the history of Man is the history of the fire-making, tool-using animal . . ."

"Then make fire," suggested the doctor. "Make us some tools, and use them."

"Don't be silly. You know that there's not an artifact among the bunch of us. No false teeth even—not even a metal filling. Even so . . ." He paused. "When I was a youngster there was, among the cadets in the interstellar ships, a revival of the old arts and crafts. We considered ourselves in a direct line of descent from the old windjammer sailormen, so we learned how to splice rope and wire, how to make sennit and fancy knots and all the rest of it. Then one of us hit on the idea of basketmaking. We were in a passenger ship, and we used to make our baskets secretly,

daub them with violent colors and then sell them to passengers as genuine souvenirs from the Lost Planet of Arcturus VI. There was a most distressing scene when the Old Man and the Mate found out. . . ."

"What are you driving at?" asked the doctor.

"Just this. We will demonstrate our manual dexterity by the weaving of baskets—I'll teach you how."

"It might work. . . ." said Boyle slowly. "It might just work. . . . On the other hand, don't forget that certain birds and animals do the same sort of thing. On Earth there's the beaver, who builds quite cunning dams. There's the bower bird, who makes a bower for his mate as part of the courtship ritual . . ."

The Head Keeper must have known of creatures whose courting habits resembled those of the Terran bower bird. After three days of feverish basketmaking, which consumed all the bedding and stripped the tree ferns, Mary Hart was taken from her cage and put in with the three men. After she had got over her hysterical pleasure at having somebody to talk to again she was rather indignant.

It was good, thought Hawkins drowsily, to have Mary with them. A few more days of solitary confinement must surely have driven the girl crazy. Even so, having Mary in the same cage had its drawbacks. He had to keep a watchful eye on young Fennet. He even had to keep a watchful eye on Boyle—the old goat!

Mary screamed.

Hawkins jerked into complete wakefulness. He could see the pale form of Mary—on this world it was never completely dark at night—and, on the other side of the cage, the forms of Fennet and Boyle. He got hastily to his feet, stumbled to the girl's side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I . . . I don't know. . . . Something small, with sharp claws . . . It ran over me. . . ."

THE CAGE

"Oh," said Hawkins, "that was only Joe."

"Joe?" she demanded

"I don't know exactly what he—or she—is," said the man.

"I think he's definitely *he*," said the doctor.

"What is Joe?" she asked again.

"He must be the local equivalent to a mouse," said the doctor, "although he looks nothing like one. He comes up through the floor somewhere to look for scraps of food. We're trying to tame him—"

"You encourage the brute?" she screamed. "I demand that you do something about him—at once! Poison him, or trap him. Now!"

"Tomorrow," said Hawkins.

"Now!" she screamed.

"Tomorrow," said Hawkins firmly.

The capture of Joe proved to be easy. Two flat baskets, hinged like the valves of an oyster shell, made the trap. There was bait inside—a large piece of the fungus. There was a cunningly arranged upright that would fall at the least tug at the bait. Hawkins, lying sleepless on his damp bed, heard the tiny click and thud that told him that the trap had been sprung. He heard Joe's indignant chitterings, heard the tiny claws scrabbling at the stout basket-work.

Mary Hart was asleep. He shook her.

"We've caught him," he said.

"Then kill him," she answered drowsily.

But Joe was not killed. The three men were rather attached to him. With the coming of daylight they transferred him to a cage that Hawkins had fashioned. Even the girl relented when she saw the harmless ball of multi-colored fur bouncing indignantly up and down in its prison. She insisted on feeding the little animal, exclaimed gleefully when the thin tentacles reached out and took the fragment of fungus from her fingers.

For three days they made much of their pet. On the fourth day beings whom they took to be keepers entered the cage

with their nets, immobilized the occupants, and carried off Joe and Hawkins.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," Boyle said. "He's gone the same way . . ."

"They'll have him stuffed and mounted in some museum," said Fennet glumly. .

"No," said the girl. "They couldn't!"

"They could," said the doctor.

Abruptly the hatch at the back of the cage opened.

Before the three humans could retreat to the scant protection supplied by a corner a voice called, "It's all right, come on out!"

Hawkins walked into the cage. He was shaved, and the beginnings of a healthy tan had darkened the pallor of his skin. He was wearing a pair of trunks fashioned from some bright red material.

"Come on out," he said again. "Our hosts have apologized very sincerely, and they have more suitable accommodation prepared for us. Then, as soon as they have a ship ready, we're to go to pick up the other survivors."

"Not so fast," said Boyle. "Put us in the picture, will you? What made them realize that we were rational beings?"

Hawkins' face darkened.

"Only rational beings," he said, "put other beings in cages."

AVRAM DAVIDSON

In which Mr. Davidson tells, with characteristic style and finesse, of a form of entertainment which might have annihilated television in its cradle . . . if the inventor had kept his mind upon purely scientific objectives.

MR. STILWELL'S STAGE

THIS HAPPENED in the Spring of 1940, in New York. The Depression was behind, the War (for us, at least) had not yet come. The violets were out, up at N.Y.U., and the bedding was being aired at windows down at Orchard Street—both sure signs of Spring. The Wilkie boom was getting under way, and so was the No Foreign War Committee; the British Consulate was picketed by party-liners who bore placards reading THE YANKS ARE NOT COMING, and LET GOD SAVE THE KING.

In the morning Edward Bunsen of the Inventors' Enterprise Company had dealt with correspondence concerning some plans to be submitted to the Patent Office. In the evening he was due to meet one of the Company's chief backers at that gentleman's home to discuss Money. As a rule Bunsen—on behalf of I.E.C.'s investors—did not see people who came with inventions unless they had some sort of reference. Crackpots could take up all his time if he would let them, and then they were apt to make nuisances of themselves for long after; hanging around the office, telephon-

ing, writing threatening letters, sometimes even instituting lawsuits. None of them had ever won, of course, because none of them had ever had a case—I.E.C. didn't operate on those lines—but it took up time and it used up money.

Still, you never knew: once the receptionist had turned away a wild and haggard man who had something in an old coffee can which he said would revolutionize the manufacture of saddle soap. He had gone, muttering and gesticulating, to another company—the receptionist *there* was A Sportsman's Daughter, and she got him a hearing, and his gunk was put on the market, and it *did* revolutionize the manufacture of saddle soap.

Those things could happen, they were among the hazards of the chase, but I.E.C. felt it was worth it. Their receptionists were well-trained.

Just after Bunsen came back from lunch (he had his own entrance and did not have to pass through the front office—he had his own phone, too, chiefly because of the former Mrs. Bunsen, who remained on good terms and had thought nothing of asking the switchboard girl if *she* knew if abortions were *really* legal in Cuba? and similar questions, indicative of her big heart and little sense) he flicked a switch on the office intercom box and was about to call his secretary when he heard the tinkle of music and the sound of happy laughter.

Bunsen was surprised rather than annoyed; it was Spring, but this had never happened any/other Spring, nor anything like it. He went out to the front office, not to make a fuss, but just to see what was up.

All of them, every one of them, was crowded around something on the receptionist's desk. He was tall enough to look over their heads. He saw a sort of box, a miniature stage complete with curtains, and a dog who was dancing on it to the music of what sounded like an old-fashioned music box. The music box was nowhere to be seen, but *that* was nothing; what held Bunsen's attention was that the dog was on scale with the stage: it must have been about an inch long. While the young women *oh'd* and *ah'd* the dog suddenly

stopped dancing and faced off stage while it went through the motions of barking. The tiny jaws worked rapidly, but there was no sound from the stage except the tinkle of the music box, even when the animal faced the crowd in front.

One of the girls turned around and saw Bunsen then; she tried to assume a deprecating expression, but couldn't keep it up. Breaking into a smile, she said, "Oh, Mr. Bun Sen, just look! It's so cutel"

They all turned around at this, and then the music stopped, abruptly. He couldn't see the stage any more because Mrs. Wimpold, the bookkeeper, was wedged in front of it like a piece of Roman siege-machinery, but he heard someone say "Oh, please, Mr. Stilwell, turn it on again!" Bunsen moved forward and saw the man. He was fiftyish-looking and had a rather pursy jowly sort of face, and on it the look of a man who knows he has said or done something purposely funny, but prefers not to laugh at his own cleverness.

Bunsen felt that he knew—just from that one glance—a lot about Mr. Stilwell. Mr. Stilwell had never joined the I AM, but he had probably been a Rosicrucian. On deciding that the fiscal and social cosmogony of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Reader's Digest* was not, after all, the correct one, Mr. Stilwell had delved—not into Marxism, but into Technocracy and the descendants of the Greenback movement. He did not Drink, but when he *did* drink, he showed his lack of practice. Mr. Stilwell believed that there was a Lot To what was said by the practitioners of Mrs. Eddy's soothing science, but when he felt unwell he bought whatever nostrum was being currently touted on the radio because The Government wouldn't Let Them Get Away With It if They weren't telling the truth. And Mrs. Stilwell was certainly a fine wife to him, but by this time she was perhaps not quite so certain that he was going to Make Good and Show Them All.

Making a quick decision, Bunsen (who was almost never faced with the need for office discipline) decided not to make an issue of the thing. He broke one of his own rules.

"Will you come inside, please, Mr. Stilwell?" he asked. The man appeared to reflect on the matter. He looked as if he were about to say that he Didn't Mind If He Did, but what he actually said was, "Why, yes, sir. Just one moment."

He turned to the women and began to smile and bow in a manner which Bunsen mentally labeled Old Cunnel. By a steady flow of *Will you excuse me, miss?* and *I'm very sorry to bother you, ma'am*, and *Thank you, thank you very much*, he managed to clear away the crowd of women and get his stage back into a container. Then, still smiling and bowing and making courtly gestures with his hat, he followed Bunsen into the inner office.

Dealing as he did more with things than with people, Bunsen seldom found it necessary to be a bastard, but he expected nothing from Mr. Stilwell and was prepared to suggest he go visit the firm which had taken on the mad saddle-soap chemist. He gestured the man to a seat, where he faced Bunsen with the self-conscious pursy smile still on his face.

"Suppose you tell me a little something about your device," Bunsen suggested, sliding out a drawer where a watch lay, face up—drawer-sliding was so much more tactful than clock-watching.

"Well," Mr. Stilwell began—only, as he accompanied it with (so Bunsen thought) a pointless chuckle, it sounded more like "Weh-hell."

"I prefer to let my own work praise me in the gates, so to speak. May I, ah, *demonstrate* it?" He unpacked the stage and placed it on the desk. It was well-made, certainly. In between attempts to defeat inertia and start a perpetual motion, Stilwell had probably turned out some nifty bird-houses.

Bunsen asked, "What kind of wood is this?"

The inventor said, "Mahogany, sir. The *best*." He touched a stud and the curtain rolled up. The interior of the stage was dark.

"Honduras? Or British Honduras?" Bunsen cared absolutely nothing about the origin of the mahogany; he was

making talk to cover the concentration with which he stared at the darkness on stage. The model theater was standing in full light from the fluorescent fixtures over Bunsen's desk; there was no possible way the interior *could* be dark . . . but it was. Tentatively he extended a finger, Stilwell making no objection. No, there was no obstruction there to cut off the light. A slight tingling in his finger . . . but he may have imagined it. Across the far corner of his mind the phrase *Darkness which could be felt* came and went before he could ponder it. Stilwell said nothing, had (perhaps) not noticed. He pressed another stud and then a third. The tinkle of the music box started again (probably in the base of the stage, Bunsen thought) and the little dog trotted out and began his dance once more. The tiny figure was outlined as if with a spotlight . . .

Only there *was* no spotlight.

Only the office lights and the darkness of the little stage and the minute area of light that accompanied the dog on his none-too-skilled dancings. Abruptly, Bunsen reached out his hand again. He met with nothing he could feel—unless there really *was* a tingle—but the image of the dog seemed to blur at the point where it touched his finger. Bunsen shivered a bit and shuddered a bit—the way he did when someone drew a shovel raspingly along a sidewalk. The papers on his desk dealt with a way to reduce the oil content in squeezed citrus juice; it seemed a hell of a long way from what he was now looking at.

"Ahhh . . . Mr. Stilwell . . ."

"Yessir?"

Bunsen wanted a drink from the water cooler, decided to skip it. He said, "Mmm . . . is there anything else? Or just the dog?"

Mr. Stilwell said, "Oh . . . Anything can be arranged. Just *anything*: like, um, lions and lion-tamers, elephants, the U. S. Marine Corps Band, opera, plays, tales of romance and revenge"—again, his silly chuckle—"only, as my means are rather, uh, *limited* right just now . . . weh-hell . . ."

"Just so. . . . All right, Mr. Stilwell, I've seen enough."

Mr. Stilwell pressed studs. The music stopped. The light went out. The curtain went down with a tiny rustle. The two men looked at one another; Stilwell pleased and pompous, Bunsen poker-faced.

"What do you have in mind for your invention? For its uses, I mean?"

Mr. Stilwell pursed his ample lips, considered. "Weh-hell . . . home entertainment, for *one* thing; and store-window advertisement, maybe . . . You take this television they've been talking about, oh, for *years*, now"—he leaned over and became patronizingly confidential—"they haven't got it *yet*. And who knows when or *if* they will? Now, you take the Ancients, Mr. Bunsen—" Bunsen's face displayed uncertainty as to which ancients he was supposed to take, or where he was supposed to take them. Smiling blandly, Stilwell said, "That is to say, the *Wis* dom of the Ancients. Mu. Atlantis, Lemuria. The old legends of the talking mirror. Weh-hell. I'd better not digreh-hess. *Any* way: A chimera, is what *I* think this television is. But my stage is as good as any television could be, and it's *here*. A bird in the hand, you know," he said, with ponderous archness.

Bunsen nodded slowly. He said, ". . . I don't want to ask you just yet to explain the principle involved, or to show me any plans . . . but the decision as to whether I.E.C. takes this up or not doesn't depend entirely on me."

Stilwell rapidly bobbed his head. "I understand, sir. You have to consult with your associates, your principals. I understand, I expected nothing else. Now—suppose I leave this with you? To show them? And I'll inquire back in, oh, about a week? *All* right. Oh, about these buttons or switches. *Very-y* simple: top to bottom: music, curtain, performance, end performance, down curtain, end music. Clear? *All* right."

Bunsen ran through them all, and Stilwell showed him how to pack the little stage away in its container. Then he bowed and weaved himself out. Before the door had closed Bunsen had begun to make up for lost time. The thing was to get

the last drop of sweet juice out without releasing the first drop of bitter oil. The rind . . .

Finally the day at the office closed. Bunsen had dinner at his usual small restaurant. Then he got in his car and began the ride up to Westchester. Nicholas Black lived there, the famous Nicky Blacky of years ago and Prohibition, that Experiment Noble In Purpose. Black was now "retired," richer than ever, respectable as any federal government could wish, though his personal habits were in no way diminished by his retired way of life or advancing age. Nicholas Black was I.E.C.'s principal stockholder, and a good thing he had in it, too.

Driving through the Bronx, Bunsen idled with the idea of picking up Stilwell and taking him along. On impulse, he took a left turn and drove to the address given on the form filled out by the receptionist. It was a two-and-a-half-story wooden house in a street filled with such houses, all wooden and all shabby, and all long since divide up into flats. Some had store fronts built into them. Stilwell's house had a defeated-looking tree in the front yard and on it was a sign reading MRS. WILSON, CORSETS. Bunsen ran his finger over the name plates at the door. Wilson, Goldberg, McCooey, Hart, and one was blank but in the frame was wedged a scrap of paper: *Joey—Gone to Aunt Irma's. Ma.* Mr. Stilwell's name was Edgar. But this was the address. Perhaps he was only a roomer. Bunsen shrugged, rang the lowest bell, that of Mrs. Wilson. Since she was, in a way, a public character, she must expect the consequences.

As the answering buzz came, he pushed through the door, and saw another one open in the hallway inside. A smell of bacon smoke and boiling cabbage came out, followed by the head of a woman who was chewing something. "I'm looking for Mr. Stilwell, please." The head (it appeared to have been fashioned by an apprentice doll-maker; Bunsen caught himself looking closely at the hairline for signs of glue)

was followed by a body. Mrs. Wilson evidently did not use her own products.

"Why, he don't live here no more," she said, frowning and swallowing and coming forward.

Bunsen shrugged. "This is the address I was given." He was set to go; it didn't matter if Stilwell had given an old address, they weren't going to bond the man. People had their odd ways. But Mrs. Wilson was not anxious to withdraw. Doing some hasty dental work with her tongue, she surged up to the front door.

"No, they moved right after Louise had all that trouble."

Again Bunsen started to leave. He was not particularly interested in the Stilwells' domestic difficulties, but Mrs. Wilson had somehow wedged herself between him and the door. Short of trying a judo hold there seemed no alternative but to stay and listen.

"I presume you know them, so I'm not revealing anything, but—Wasn't that a *terrible* thing? He took it like a gentleman, though, I must say. 'I forgive you, Louise,' he hollered—I could *hear* him, right-through-the-wall!" She pumped her head up and down. " 'I forgive you, Louise,' he hollered. 'It's *my* fault I cou'n't give you the things you deserve,' he said. Oh, he admitted *that* all right. He says, 'I forgive you,' and she says back to him, oh, crying something awful, 'But I can't forgive *myself*,' she says. Sobbing, you know. And crying? . . . I'm sorry that I can't tell you where they went, but they didn't tell me." An aggrieved note came into her voice. "Although I sh'd think they *might* of, Louise and me being so close. After all, it was *me* who found her with her head by the gas oven, *Me*." She thumped the place where her bosom had once been. "I heard the lil dog whimpering and I climbed right-through-the-window, and *if I hadn't*—"

But this was too much, far too much. Mrs. Wilson unwisely moved just enough to give him clearance, and Bunsen slithered through. "I'm very sorry to have bothered you," he said, sincerely enough, over his shoulder, and walked rapidly away, half-fearful that Mrs. Wilson would come pounding

after and drag him back. What *had* Louise done? Dropped a half-pound of supermarket sliced bacon in her reticule, no doubt, and been picked up by the Pinkertons. Well, it wasn't any of his business. He drove off.

Nicholas Black lived in a large well-kept house like any other, in a village full of large well-kept houses. An unobtrusive couple who performed all the domestic duties lived there with him. Black had no immediate family.

"Hello, Ed," he greeted Bunsen, and looked at the case he was carrying, "Should've had Carl give you a hand with that. Something to show me?"

"After the usual business, yes." Bunsen noticed, with some relief, as he looked around the well-furnished room, that tonight there were no traces of female guests he was not intended to meet. No long gloves on the couch, no expensive handbag on the chair, no fur stole. Once, some months before, he had been rather surprised to see a cheap brown pair of women's houseshoes somewhere about. Nicholas Black wasn't the sort to entertain women who wore cheap brown houseshoes. Anyway, they weren't there when he had gotten ready to leave.

An hour passed, devoted to talk of figures and sums. Finally Bunsen packed away the papers and Black said, "Well, now for a drink and a look at whatever-it-is in the case here." Black never drank while there was talk of money. The drink was made and accepted and Bunsen drank half of it before he began to unpack the stage.

"This was made by some old character who thinks that television is a chimera."

Black grunted. "I just wish *we'd* put some money into that chimera," he said. "It will be on the market before a lot of people expect it to."

He looked like a turtle from whose jaws a fish had just escaped. Bunsen had the stage ready. "What interests me most in this is the lighting." He pressed the UP CURTAIN stud. "Or rather, the darkening . . . here, turn that lamp full on

it . . . you see? Stage remains dark. Can't you imagine what uses might be made of a method of lighting just part of an area while the rest stays dark?"

Black nodded slowly and looked intently at the stage. Bunsen started the music and then pressed the third stud for the performance. "Never mind that dog," he said.

"What dog?" Black asked; but Bunsen didn't answer at once because he saw that there *was* no dog on the stage. Instead, a tiny man, dressed in green, was dancing—or rather, capering. Not a very young man, to judge from the figure. The face was masked.

"Robin Hood, I suppose that's what he's meant to be." A feathered cap was cocked on the man's head, he had a bow and quiver slung about him. "That's funny—there was a dog the last time. . . . Well, he *said* it could show *anything* . . . Now watch that lighting; d'you see?"

Black waved him aside impatiently, said, "Yeah, yeah." Suddenly, two figures were on the little stage.

"If that's Maid Marian, she's kind of pudgy for the role."

Solemnly and awkwardly the two figures performed the dance. They bowed towards each other, removed their masks, and then bowed down stage. Bunsen leaned close, suddenly noticed that the woman was wearing a tiny pair of what seemed to be brown houseshoes. Then he looked up at their faces.

The words formed in Bunsen's mind, Why, that's *him*—the pursy jowly self-consciously clever smile was almost absent, though, from the tiny features: the face was taut with fear or hate, an edge of teeth gleamed—all in a second Bunsen turned from the stage to Black, but before he could say the words his mind had formed, he saw Black lunge forward in his chair, face scarlet.

"*Louise!*" cried Nicholas Black.

Everything happened so quickly. The tiny figure in the green dress covered her face with a tiny hand, and the man whipped off his bow and fitted it with an arrow he had plucked from over his shoulder. Bunsen afterwards was never

sure if the arrow had been shot or not, because he dashed his hand at the stage and knocked it to the ground. Even before he heard it strike the floor he turned around and Black was slumped in the chair, eyes open, mouth open . . .

"I told him, I don't *know* how many times, that he couldn't keep on, carry on, like he did—like he was a twenty-year-old," the doctor said, later, putting his stethoscope away. "But he'd laugh at me, or snarl at me, as his mood might be, and he'd say, 'I take what I want and I do what I want.' Well, well . . . *he* went quickly, want to or *not*. Just fell over in his chair, you say? I'm not surprised."

It was morning before Bunsen finally got away. At his home, he set up the stage and pressed the studs. Nothing happened. Finally, he took a knife and a screwdriver and forced the base open. There was nothing in it—nothing, that is, that could have made it work. Nothing that could give any hint or explanation of how it *had* worked. There was a piece of amber, a crystal which might have come from an old radio set, a vial of quicksilver which must have shattered when he knocked the stage over, some long strands of faded blonde hair running through everything—odds and ends like that. Really, nothing . . .

Bunsen's private investigators found no trace of the Stilwells. From whatever down-at-heels world they had come, it appeared that they had returned there once more—furnished rooms in old, shabby wooden houses, and, like a concealing fog or pall, the smell of bacon smoke and boiled cabbage—with great new hopes for each new job ("Why, one of our men made \$125 last week selling Watkins Products!") and lots and lots of solemn talk about The Wisdom Of The Ancients. . . . Just what had occurred between them and Black might be conjectured, never proved.

And although Bunsen tried to repair the model stage, tried to fix it up with another vial of quicksilver and fit it all together again; although he often—when his door is locked—spends long periods pressing the studs, nothing ever happens.

AVRAM DAVIDSON

It is a long time now, and it begins to seem as if it never *could* have happened—though he knows it did. But Mr. Stilwell's stage had played its single "tale of romance and revenge," and it has never given another performance.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Arthur C. Clarke, poet, realist and humorist of science fiction and fact, has come up with something unparalleled even in his versatile career; a series of six brief episodes from the first moon-flight, which delightfully combine the detailed and evocative factuality of his PRELUDE TO SPACE with the anecdotal entertainment of his TALES FROM THE WHITE HART—stories to make you smile even while they convey the unarguable feeling of "This is what it will be like."

VENTURE TO THE MOON

I: THE STARTING LINE

THE STORY of the First Lunar Expedition has been written so many times that some people will doubt if there is anything fresh to be said about it. Yet all the official reports and eyewitness accounts, the on-the-spot recordings and broadcasts never, in my opinion, gave the full picture. They said a great deal about the discoveries that were made—but very little about the men who made them.

As captain of the *Endeavour* and thus commander of the British party, I was able to observe a good many things you will not find in the history books, and some (though not all) of them can now be told. One day, I hope, my opposite

numbers on the *Goddard* and the *Tsiolkovski* will give their points of view. But as Commander Vandenburg is still on Mars and Commander Krasnin is somewhere inside the orbit of Venus, it looks as if we will have to wait a few more years for *their* memoirs.

Confession, it is said, is good for the soul. I shall certainly feel much happier when I have told the true story behind the timing of the first lunar flight, about which there has always been a good deal of mystery.

As everyone knows, the American, Russian and British ships were assembled in the orbit of Space Station Three, five hundred miles above the Earth, from components flown up by relays of freight rockets. Though all the parts had been pre-fabricated, the assembly and testing of the ships took over two years, by which time a great many people—who did not realise the complexity of the task—were beginning to get slightly impatient. They had seen dozens of photos and telecasts of the three ships floating there in space beside Station Three, apparently quite complete and ready to pull away from Earth at a moment's notice. What the pictures didn't show was the careful and tedious work still in progress as thousands of pipes, wires, motors and instruments were fitted and subjected to every conceivable test.

There was no definite target-date for departure; since the Moon is always at approximately the same distance, you can leave for it at almost any time you like . . . once you are ready. It makes practically no difference, from the point of view of fuel consumption, if you blast off at full moon or new moon or at any time in between. We were very careful to make no predictions about blast-off, though everyone was always trying to get us to fix the time. So many things can go wrong in a spaceship, and we were not going to say good-bye to Earth until we were ready down to the last detail.

I shall always remember the last Commanders' conference, aboard the Space Station, when we all announced that we were ready. Since it was a cooperative venture, each party specialising in some particular task, it had been agreed that

we should all make our landings within the same twenty-four-hour period, on the preselected site in the Mare Imbrium. The details of the journey, however, had been left to the individual commanders, presumably in the hope that we would not copy each other's mistakes.

"I'll be ready," said Commander Vandenburg, "to make my first dummy takeoff at 0900 tomorrow. What about you, gentlemen? Shall we ask Earth Control to stand by for all three of us?"

"That's OK by me," said Krasnin, who could never be convinced that his American slang was twenty years out of date.

I nodded my agreement. It was true that one bank of fuel gauges was still misbehaving, but that didn't really matter; they would be fixed by the time the tanks were filled.

The dummy run consisted of an exact replica of a real blast-off, with everyone carrying out the job he would do when the time came for the genuine thing. We had practised, of course, in mock-ups down on Earth, but this was a perfect imitation of what would happen to us when we finally took off for the Moon. All that was missing was the roar of the motors that would tell us that the voyage had begun.

We did six complete imitations of blast-off, took the ships to pieces to eliminate anything that hadn't behaved perfectly, then did six more. The *Endeavour*, the *Goddard* and the *Tsiolkovski* were all in the same state of serviceability. It now only remained to fuel up, and we would be ready to leave.

The suspense of those last few hours is not something I would care to go through again. The eyes of the world were upon us; departure time had now been set, with an uncertainty of only a few hours. All the final tests had been made and we were convinced that our ships were as ready as humanly possible.

It was then that I had an urgent and secret personal radio call from a very high official indeed, and a suggestion was made which had so much authority behind it that there was little point in pretending that it wasn't an order. The

first flight to the Moon, I was reminded, was a cooperative venture—but think of the prestige if *we* got there first. It need only be by a couple of hours. . . .

I was shocked at the suggestion, and said so. By this time Vandenburg and Krasnin were good friends of mine and we were all in this together. I made every excuse I could and said that since our flight-paths had been already computed there wasn't anything that could be done about it. Each ship was making the journey by the most economical route, to conserve fuel. If we started together, we would arrive together, within seconds.

Unfortunately, someone had thought of the answer to that. Our three ships, fuelled up and with their crews standing by, would be circling Earth in a state of complete readiness for several hours before they actually pulled away from their satellite orbits and headed out to the Moon. At our five hundred-mile altitude, we took ninety-five minutes to make one circuit of the Earth, and only once every revolution would the moment be ripe to begin the voyage. If we could jump the gun by one revolution, the others would have to wait that ninety-five minutes before they could follow. And so they would land on the Moon ninety-five minutes behind us. . . .

I won't go into the arguments, and I'm still a little ashamed that I yielded and agreed to deceive my two colleagues. We were in the shadow of Earth, in momentary eclipse, when the carefully calculated moment came. Vandenburg and Krasnin, honest fellows, thought I was going to make one more round trip with them before we all set off together. I have seldom felt a bigger heel in my life than when I pressed the firing key and felt the sudden thrust of the motors as they swept me away from my mother world.

For the next ten minutes we had no time for anything but our instruments, as we checked that the *Endeavour* was forging ahead along her precomputed orbit. Almost at the moment that we finally escaped from Earth and could cut the motors, we burst out of shadow into the full blaze of the sun. There would be no more night until we reached the

Moon, after five days of effortless and silent coasting through space.

Already Space Station Three and the two other ships must be a thousand miles behind. In eighty-five more minutes Vandenburg and Krasnin would be back at the correct starting point and could take off after me, as we had all planned. But they could never overcome my lead, and I hoped they wouldn't be too mad at me when we met again on the Moon.

I switched on the rear camera and looked back at the distant gleam of the Space Station, just emerging from the shadow of Earth. It was some moments before I realised that the *Goddard* and the *Tsiolkovski* weren't still floating beside it where I'd left them.

No; they were just half a mile away, neatly matching my velocity. I stared at them in utter disbelief for a second, before I realised that every one of us had had the same idea. "Why, you pair of double-crossers!" I gasped. Then I began to laugh so much that it was several minutes before I dared call up a very worried Earth Control and tell them that everything had gone according to plan. Though in no case was it the plan that had been originally announced. . . .

We were all very sheepish when we radioed each other to exchange mutual congratulations. Yet at the same time, I think everyone was secretly pleased that it had turned out this way. For the rest of the trip, we were never more than a few miles apart, and the actual landing manoeuvres were so well synchronised that our three braking jets hit the Moon simultaneously.

Well, almost simultaneously. I might make something of the fact that the recorder tape shows I touched down two-fifths of a second ahead of Krasnin. But I'd better not, for Vandenburg was the same amount ahead of me.

On a quarter-of-a-million-mile trip, I think you could call that a photo finish.

II: ROBIN HOOD, F.R.S.

WE HAD landed early in the dawn of the long lunar day, and the slanting shadows lay all around us, extending for miles across the plain. They would slowly shorten as the sun rose higher in the sky until at noon they had almost vanished—but noon was still five days away as we measured time on Earth, and nightfall was seven days later still. We had almost two weeks of daylight ahead of us before the sun set and the bluely gleaming Earth became the mistress of the sky.

There was little time for exploration during those first hectic days. We had to unload the ships, grow accustomed to the alien conditions surrounding us, learn to handle our electrically powered tractors and scooters, and erect the igloos which would serve as homes, offices and labs until the time came to leave. At a pinch, we could live in the spaceships, but it would be excessively uncomfortable and cramped. The igloos were not exactly commodious, but they were luxury after five days in space. Made of tough, flexible plastic, they were blown up like balloons and their interiors were then partitioned into separate rooms. Airlocks allowed access to the outer world, and a good deal of plumbing linked to the ships' air-purification plants kept the atmosphere breathable. Needless to say, the American igloo was the biggest one, and had come complete with everything *including* the kitchen sink. Not to mention a washing machine which we and the Russians were always borrowing.

It was late in the "afternoon"—about ten days after we had landed—before we were properly organised and could think about serious scientific work. The first parties made nervous little forays out into the wilderness around the base, familiarising themselves with the territory. Of course, we already possessed minutely detailed maps and photographs of the region in which we had landed, but it was surprising how misleading they could sometimes be. What had been marked as a small hill on a chart often looked like a moun-

tain to a man toiling along in a spacesuit, and apparently smooth plains were often covered knee-deep with dust, which made progress extremely slow and tedious.

These were minor difficulties, however, and the low gravity, which gave all objects only a sixth of their terrestrial weight, compensated for much. As the scientists began to accumulate their results and specimens, the radio and TV circuits with Earth became busier and busier, until they were in continuous operation. We were taking no chances; even if *we* didn't get home, the knowledge we were gathering would do so.

The first of the automatic supply rockets landed two days before sunset, precisely according to plan. We saw its braking jets flame briefly against the stars, then blast again a few seconds before touchdown. The actual landing was hidden from us since for safety reasons the dropping ground was three miles from Base. And on the Moon, three miles is well over the curve of the horizon.

When we got to the robot, it was standing slightly askew on its tripod shock-absorbers, but in perfect condition. So was everything aboard it, from instruments to food. We carried the stores back to Base in triumph, and had a celebration that was really rather overdue. The men had been working too hard, and could do with some relaxation.

It was quite a party; the highlight, I think, was Commander Krasnin trying to do a Cossack dance in a spacesuit. Then we turned our minds to competitive sports, but found that, for obvious reasons, outdoor activities were somewhat restricted. Games like croquet or bowls would have been practical had we the equipment; but cricket and football were definitely out. In this gravity, even a football would go half a mile if it were given a good kick—and a cricket ball would never be seen again.

Professor Trevor Williams was the first person to think of a practical lunar sport. He was our astronomer, and also one of the youngest men ever to be made a Fellow of the Royal Society, being only thirty when this ultimate accolade was

conferred upon him. His work on methods of interplanetary navigation had made him world-famous; less well-known, however, was his skill as a toxophilist. For two years in succession he had been archery champion for Wales; I was not surprised, therefore, when I discovered him shooting at a target propped up on a pile of lunar slag.

The bow was a curious one, strung with steel control wire and shaped from a laminated plastic bar. I wondered where Trevor had got hold of it, then remembered that the robot freight rocket had now been cannibalised and bits of it were appearing in all sorts of unexpected places. The arrows, however, were the really interesting feature. To give them stability on the airless Moon, where of course feathers would be useless, Trevor had managed to rifle them. There was a little gadget on the bow that set them spinning, like bullets, when they were fired, so that they kept on course when they left the bow.

Even with this rather makeshift equipment, it was possible to shoot a mile if one wished to. However, Trevor didn't want to waste arrows, which were not easy to make; he was more interested in seeing the sort of accuracy he could get. It was uncanny to watch the almost flat trajectory of the arrows: they seemed to be travelling parallel to the ground. If he wasn't careful, someone warned Trevor, his arrows might become lunar satellites and would hit him in the back when they completed their orbit.

The second supply rocket arrived the next day, but this time things didn't go according to plan. It made a perfect touchdown, but unfortunately the radar-controlled automatic pilot made one of those mistakes which such simple-minded machines delight in doing. It spotted the only really unclimbable hill in the neighborhood, locked its beam on to the summit of it, and settled down there like an eagle coming descending upon its mountain eyrie.

Our badly needed supplies were five hundred feet above our heads, and in a few hours night would be falling. What was to be done?

About fifteen people made the same suggestion at once, and for the next few minutes there was a great scurrying about as we rounded up all the nylon line on the Base. Soon there was more than a thousand yards of it coiled in neat loops at Trevor's feet while we all waited expectantly. He tied one end to his arrow, drew the bow, and aimed it experimentally straight towards the stars. The arrow rose a little more than half the height of the cliff; then the weight of the line pulled it back.

"Sorry," said Trevor. "I just can't make it. And don't forget—we'd have to send up some kind of grapnel as well if we want the end to stay up there."

There was much gloom for the next few minutes, as we watched the coils of line fall slowly back from the sky. The situation was really somewhat absurd. In our ships we had enough energy to carry us a quarter of a million miles from the Moon—yet we were baffled by a puny cliff. If we had time, we could probably find a way up to the top from the other side of the hill, but that would mean travelling several miles. It would be dangerous, and might well be impossible, during the few hours of daylight that were left.

Scientists are never baffled for long, and too many ingenious (sometimes over-ingenious) minds were working on the problem for it to remain unresolved. But this time it was a little more difficult, and only three people got the answer simultaneously. Trevor thought it over, then said non-committally, "Well, it's worth trying."

The preparations took a little while, and we were all watching anxiously as the rays of the sinking sun crept higher and higher up the sheer cliff looming above us. Even if Trevor could get a line and grapnel up there, I thought to myself, it would not be easy making the ascent while encumbered in a spacesuit. I have no head for heights, and was glad that several mountaineering enthusiasts had already volunteered for the job.

At last everything was ready. The line had been carefully arranged so that it would lift from the ground with the

minimum of hindrance. A light grapnel had been attached to the line a few feet behind the arrow; we hoped that it would catch in the rocks up there and wouldn't let us down—all too literally—when we put our trust in it.

This time, however, Trevor was not using a single arrow. He attached four to the line, at two-hundred-yard intervals. And I shall never forget that incongruous spectacle of the spacesuited figure, gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, as it drew its bow against the sky.

The arrow sped towards the stars, and before it had lifted more than fifty feet Trevor was already fitting the second one to his improvised bow. It raced after its predecessor, carrying the other end of the long loop that was now being hoisted into space. Almost at once the third followed, lifting its section of line—and I swear that the fourth arrow, with *its* section, was on the way before the first had noticeably slackened its momentum.

Now that there was no question of a single arrow lifting the entire length of line, it was not hard to reach the required altitude. The first two times the grapnel fell back; then it caught firmly somewhere up on the hidden plateau—and the first volunteer began to haul himself up the line. It was true that he weighed only about thirty pounds in this low gravity, but it was still a long fall to the bottom.

He didn't. The stores in the freight rocket started coming down the cliff within the next hour, and everything essential had been lowered before night-fall. I must confess, however, that my satisfaction was considerably abated when one of the engineers proudly showed me the mouth organ he had had sent from Earth. Even then I felt certain that we would all be very tired of that instrument before the long lunar night had ended. . . .

But that, of course, was hardly Trevor's fault. As we walked back to the ship together, through the great pools of shadow that were flowing swiftly over the plain, he made a proposal which, I am sure, has puzzled thousands of people ever

since the detailed maps of the First Lunar Expedition were published.

After all, it does seem a little odd that a flat and lifeless plain, broken by a single small mountain, should now be labelled on all the charts of the Moon as Sherwood Forest.

III: GREEN FINGERS

I AM VERY sorry, now that it's too late, that I never got to know Vladimir Surov. As I remember him, he was a quiet little man who could understand English but couldn't speak it well enough to make conversation. Even to his colleagues, I suspect he was a bit of an enigma; whenever I went aboard the *Tsiolkovski*, he would be sitting in a corner working on his notes or peering through a microscope, a man who clung to his privacy even in the tight and tiny world of a spaceship. The rest of the crew did not seem to mind his aloofness; when they spoke to him, it was clear that they regarded him with tolerant affection, as well as with respect. That was hardly surprising; the work he had done developing plants to flourish far inside the Arctic Circle had already made him the most famous botanist in Russia.

The fact that the Russian expedition had taken a botanist to the Moon had caused a good deal of amusement, though it was really no odder than the fact that there were biologists on both the British and American ships. During the years before the first lunar landing, a good deal of evidence had accumulated hinting that some form of vegetation might exist on the Moon, despite its airlessness and lack of water. The President of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Science was one of the leading proponents of this theory, and being too old to make the trip himself had done the next best thing by sending Surov.

The complete absence of any such vegetation, living or fossil, in the thousand or so square miles explored by our various parties was the first big disappointment the Moon

had reserved for us. Even those sceptics who were quite certain that no form of life could exist on the Moon would have been very glad to have been proven wrong—as of course they were, five years later, when Richards and Shannon made their astonishing discovery inside the great walled plain of Eratosthenes. But *that* revelation still lay in the future; at the time of the first landing, it seemed that Surov had come to the Moon in vain.

He did not appear unduly depressed, but kept himself as busy as the rest of the crew studying soil samples and looking after the little hydroponic farm whose pressurised transparent tubes formed a gleaming network around the *Tsiolkovski*. Neither we nor the Americans had gone in for this sort of thing, having calculated that it was better to ship food from Earth than to grow it on the spot—at least until the time came to set up a permanent base. We were right, in terms of economics, but wrong, in terms of morale. The tiny air-tight greenhouses inside which Surov grew his vegetables and dwarf fruit trees were an oasis upon which we often feasted our eyes when we had grown tired of the immense desolation surrounding us.

One of the many disadvantages of being commander was that I seldom had much chance to do any active exploring; I was too busy preparing reports for Earth, checking stores, arranging programmes and duty rosters, conferring with my opposite numbers in then American and Russian ships, and trying—not always successfully—to guess what would go wrong next. As a result I sometimes did not go outside the base for two or three days at a time, and it was a standing joke that my spacesuit was a haven for moths.

Perhaps it is because of this that I can remember all my trips outside so vividly; certainly I can recall my only encounter with Surov. It was near noon, with the sun high above the southern mountains and the New Earth a barely visible thread of silver a few degrees away from it. Henderson, our geophysicist, wanted to take some magnetic readings at a series of check points a couple of miles to the east of Base.

Everyone else was busy, and I was momentarily on top of my work, so we set off together on foot.

The journey was not long enough to merit taking one of the scooters, especially as the charges in the batteries were getting low. In any case, I always enjoyed walking out in the open on the Moon. It was not merely the scenery, which even at its most awe-inspiring one can grow accustomed to after a while. No—what I never tired of was the effortless, slow-motion way in which every step took me bounding over the landscape, giving me the freedom which before the coming of spaceflight men knew only in dreams.

We had done the job and were halfway home when I noticed a figure moving across the plain about a mile to the south of us—not far, in fact, from the Russian base. I snapped my field glasses down inside my helmet and took a careful look at the other explorer. Even at close range, of course, you can't identify a man in a spacesuit, but as suits are always coded by colour and numbering that makes no practical difference.

"Who is it?" asked Henderson over the short-range radio channel to which we were both tuned.

"Blue suit, Number 3 . . . that would be Surov. But I don't understand. *He's by himself.*"

It is one of the most fundamental rules of lunar exploration that no one goes anywhere alone on the surface of the Moon. So many accidents can happen which would be trivial if you were with a companion—but are fatal if you are by yourself. How would you manage, for example, if your spacesuit developed a slow leak in the small of the back and you couldn't put on a repair patch? That may sound funny; but it's happened.

"Perhaps his buddy has had an accident and he's going to fetch help," suggested Henderson. "Maybe we had better call him."

I shook my head. Surov was obviously in no hurry. He had been out on a trip of his own, and was making his leisurely way back to the *Tsiolkovski*. It was no concern of

mine if Commander Krasnin let his people go out on solo trips, though it seemed a deplorable practice. And if Surov was breaking regulations, it was equally no concern of mine to report him.

During the next two months, my men often spotted Surov making his lone way over the landscape, but he always avoided them if they got too near. I made some discreet enquiries, and found that Commander Krasnin had been forced, owing to shortage of men, to relax some of his safety rules. But I couldn't find out what Surov was up to, though I never dreamed that his Commander was equally in the dark.

It was with an "I told you so" feeling that I got Krasnin's emergency call. We had all of us had men in trouble before and had had to send out help, but this was the first time anyone had been lost and had not been able to reply when his ship had sent out the recall signal. There was a hasty radio conference, a line of action was drawn up, and search parties fanned out from each of the three ships.

Once again I was with Henderson, and it was only common sense for us to back-track along the route which we had seen Surov following. It was in what we regarded as "our" territory, quite some distance away from Surov's own ship, and as we scrambled up the low foothills it occurred to me for the first time that the Russian might have been doing something he wanted to keep from his colleagues. What it might be, I could not imagine.

Henderson found him, and yelled for help over his suit radio. But it was much too late; Surov was lying, face down, his deflated suit crumpled around him. He had been kneeling when something had smashed the plastic globe of his helmet; you could see how he had pitched forward and died instantaneously.

When Commander Krasnin reached us, we were still staring at the unbelievable object which Surov had been examining when he died. It was about three feet high, a leathery, greenish oval rooted to the rocks with a widespread network of tendrils. Yes—rooted; for it was a plant. A few yards

away were two others, much smaller and apparently dead, since they were blackened and withered.

My first reaction was: "So there *is* life on the Moon after all!" It was not until Krasnin's voice spoke in my ears that I realised how much more marvellous was the truth.

"Poor Vladimir Ilyich!" he said. "We knew he was a genius, yet we laughed at him when he told us of his dream. So he kept his greatest work a secret. He conquered the Arctic with his hybrid wheat, but *that* was only a beginning. He has brought life to the Moon . . . and death as well."

As I stood there, in that first moment of astonished revelation, it still seemed a miracle. Today, all the world knows the history of "Surov's cactus," as it was inevitably if quite inaccurately christened, and it has lost much of its wonder. His notes have told the full story, and have described the years of experimentation which finally led him to a plant whose leathery skin would enable it to survive in vacuum, and whose far-ranging, acid-secreting roots would enable it to grow upon rocks where even lichens would be hard-put to thrive. And we have seen the realisation of the second stage of Surov's dream, for the cactus which will forever bear his name has already broken up vast areas of the lunar rock and so prepared a way for the more specialised plants which now feed every human being upon the Moon.

Krasnin bent down beside the body of his colleague and lifted it effortlessly against the low gravity. He fingered the shattered fragments of the plastic helmet, and shook his head in perplexity.

"What could have happened to him?" he said. "It almost looks as if the plant did it, but that's ridiculous."

The green enigma stood there on the no-longer-barren plain, tantalising us with its promise and its mystery. Then Henderson, who had been silent, said slowly, as if thinking aloud:

"I believe I've got the answer; I've just remembered some of the botany I did at school. If Surov designed this plant for lunar conditions, how would he arrange for it to prop-

agate itself? The seeds would have to be scattered over a very wide area in the hope of finding a few suitable places to grow. There are no birds or animals here to carry them, in the way that happens on Earth. I can think of only one solution—and some of our terrestrial plants have already used it.”

He was interrupted by my yell. Something had hit with a resounding clang against the metal waistband of my suit. It did no damage, but it was so sudden and unexpected that it took me utterly by surprise.

The second seed lay at my feet, about the size and shape of a plumstone. A few yards away, we found the one that had shattered Surov's helmet as he bent down. He must have known that the plant was ripe, but in his eagerness to examine it he had forgotten what that implied. I have seen a cactus throw its seed a quarter of a mile under the low lunar gravity. Surov had been shot at point-blank range by his own creation.

IV: ALL THAT GLITTERS

THIS is really Commander Vandenburg's story, but he is too many millions of miles away to tell it. It concerns his geophysicist, Dr. Paynter, who was generally believed to have gone to the Moon to get away from his wife.

At one time or other, we were all supposed (often by our wives) to have done just that. However, in Paynter's case, there was just enough truth to make it stick.

It was not that he disliked his wife; one could almost say the contrary. He would do anything for her, but unfortunately the things that she wanted him to do cost rather too much. She was a lady of extravagant tastes, and such ladies are advised not to marry scientists—even scientists who go to the Moon.

Mrs. Paynter's weakness was for jewellery, particularly diamonds. As might be expected, this was a weakness that

caused her husband a good deal of worry. Being a conscientious as well as an affectionate husband, he did not merely worry about it—he did something about it. He became one of the world's leading experts on diamonds, from the scientific rather than the commercial point of view, and probably knew more about their composition, origin and properties than any other man alive. Unfortunately, you may know a lot about diamonds without ever possessing any, and her husband's erudition was not something that Mrs. Paynter could wear round her neck when she went to a party.

Geophysics, as I have mentioned, was Dr. Paynter's real business; diamonds were merely a side-line. He had developed many remarkable surveying instruments which could probe the interior of the Earth by means of electric impulses and magnetic waves, so giving a kind of X-ray picture of the hidden strata far below. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that he was one of the men chosen to pry into the mysterious interior of the Moon.

He was quite eager to go, but it seemed to Commander Vandenburg that he was reluctant to leave Earth at this particular moment. A number of men had shown such symptoms; sometimes they were due to fears that could not be eradicated and an otherwise promising man had to be left behind. In Paynter's case, however, the reluctance was quite impersonal. He was in the middle of a big experiment—something he had been working on all his life—and he didn't want to leave Earth until it was finished. However, the First Lunar Expedition could not wait for him, so he had to leave his project in the hands of his assistants. He was continually exchanging cryptic radio messages with them, to the great annoyance of the Signals Section of Space Station Three.

In the wonder of a new world waiting to be explored, Paynter soon forgot his earthly preoccupations. He would dash hither and yon over the lunar landscape on one of the neat little electric scooters the Americans had brought with them, carrying seismographs, magnetometers, gravity meters, and all the other esoteric tools of the geophysicist's trade.

He was trying to learn, in a few weeks, what it had taken men hundreds of years to discover about their own planet. It was true that he had only a small sample of the Moon's fourteen million square miles of territory to explore, but he intended to make a thorough job of it.

From time to time he continued to get messages from his colleagues back on Earth, as well as brief but affectionate signals from Mrs. P. Neither seemed to interest him very much; even when you are not so busy that you have hardly time to sleep, a quarter of a million miles puts most of one's personal affairs in a different perspective. I think that on the Moon Dr. Paynter was really happy for the first time in his life; if so, he was not the only one.

Not far from our base there was a rather fine crater-pit, a great blow-hole in the lunar surface almost two miles from rim to rim. Though it was fairly close at hand, it was outside the normal area of our joint operations and we had been on the Moon for six weeks before Paynter led a party of three men off in one of the baby tractors to have a look at it. They disappeared from radio range over the edge of the Moon, but we weren't worried about that because if they ran into trouble they could always call Earth and get any message relayed back to us.

Paynter and his men were gone forty-eight hours, which is about the maximum for continuous working on the Moon even with booster drugs. At first their little expedition was quite uneventful and therefore quite unexciting; everything went according to plan. They reached the crater, inflated their pressurised igloo and unpacked their stores, took their instrument readings and then set up a portable drill to get core samples. It was while he was waiting for the drill to bring him up a nice section of the Moon that Paynter made his second great discovery. He had made his first about ten hours before, but he didn't know it yet.

Around the lip of the crater, lying where they had been thrown up by the great explosions that had convulsed the lunar landscape three hundred million years before, were

immense piles of rock which must have come from many miles down in the Moon's interior. Anything he could do with his little drill, thought Paynter, could hardly compare with *this*. Unfortunately the mountain-sized geological specimens that lay all around him were not neatly arranged in their correct order; they had been scattered over the landscape, much farther than the eye could see, according to the arbitrary violence of the eruptions that had blasted them into space.

Paynter climbed over these immense slag-heaps, taking a swing at likely samples with his little hammer. Presently his colleagues heard him yell, and saw him come running back to them carrying what appeared to be a lump of rather poor quality glass. It was some time before he was sufficiently coherent to explain what all the fuss was about—and some time later still before the expedition remembered its real job and got back to work.

Vandenburg watched the returning party as it headed back to the ship. The three men didn't seem so tired as one would have expected, considering the fact that they had been on their feet for two days. Indeed, there was a certain jauntiness about their movements which even the spacesuits couldn't wholly conceal. You could see that the expedition had been a success. In that case, Paynter would have two causes for congratulation. The priority message which had just come from Earth was very cryptic, but it was clear that Paynter's work there—whatever it was—had finally reached a triumphant conclusion.

Commander Vandenburg almost forgot the message when he saw what Paynter was holding in his hand. He knew what a raw diamond looked like, and this was the second largest that anyone had ever seen. Only the Cullinan, tipping the scales at 3032 carats, beat it by a slender margin. "We ought to have expected it," he heard Paynter babble happily; "diamonds are always found associated with volcanic vents. But somehow I never thought the analogy would hold here."

Vandenburg suddenly remembered the signal, and handed

it over to Paynter. He read it quickly, and his jaw dropped. Never in his life, Vandenburg told me, had he seen a man so instantly deflated by a message of congratulation. The signal read: WE'VE DONE IT. TEST 541 WITH MODIFIED PRESSURE CONTAINER COMPLETE SUCCESS. NO PRACTICAL LIMIT TO SIZE. COSTS NEGLIGIBLE.

"What's the matter?" said Vandenburg, when he saw the stricken look on Paynter's face. "It doesn't seem bad news to me, whatever it means."

Paynter gulped two or three times like a stranded fish, then stared helplessly at the great crystal that almost filled the palm of his hand. He tossed it into the air, and it floated back in the slow-motion way everything has under lunar gravity.

Finally he found his voice.

"My lab's been working for years," he said, "trying to synthesise diamonds. Yesterday this thing was worth a million pounds. Today it's worth a couple of hundred. I'm not sure if I'll bother to carry it back to Earth."

Well, he *did* carry it back; it seemed a pity not to. For about three months, Mrs. P. had the finest diamond necklace in the world, worth every bit of five hundred pounds—mostly the cost of cutting and polishing. Then the Paynter Process went into commercial production, and a month later she got her divorce. The grounds were extreme mental cruelty; and I suppose you could say it was justified.

V: WATCH THIS SPACE

It was quite a surprise to discover, when I looked it up, that the most famous experiment we carried out while we were on the Moon had its beginnings way back in 1955. At that time, high-altitude rocket research had been going for only about ten years, mostly at White Sands, New Mexico. 1955 was the date of one of the most spectacular of those

early experiments, which involved the ejection of sodium onto the upper atmosphere.

On Earth, even on the clearest night, the sky between the stars isn't completely dark. There's a very faint background glow, and part of it is caused by the fluorescence of sodium atoms a hundred miles up. Since it would take the sodium in a good many cubic miles of the upper atmosphere to fill a single matchbox, it seemed to the early investigators that they could make quite a fireworks display if they used a rocket to dump a few pounds of the stuff into the ionosphere.

They were right. The sodium squirted out of a rocket above White Sands early in 1955 produced a great yellow glow in the sky which was visible, like a kind of artificial moonlight, for over an hour before the atoms dispersed. This experiment wasn't done for fun (though it *was* fun) but for a serious scientific purpose. Instruments trained on this glow were able to gather new knowledge which went into the stockpile of information without which spaceflight would never have been possible.

When they got to the Moon, the Americans decided that it would be a good idea to repeat the experiment there, on a much larger scale. A few hundred kilogrammes of sodium fired up from the surface would produce a display that would be visible from Earth, in a good pair of field glasses, as it fluoresced its way up through the lunar atmosphere.

(Some people, by the way, still don't realise that the Moon *has* an atmosphere. It's about a million times too thin to be breathable, but if you have the right instruments you can detect it. As a meteor shield, it's first-rate, for though it may be tenuous it's hundreds of miles deep.)

Everyone had been talking about the experiment for days. The sodium bomb had arrived from Earth in the last supply rocket, and a very impressive piece of equipment it looked. Its operation was extremely simple; when ignited, an incendiary charge vaporised the sodium until a high pressure was built up, then a diaphragm burst and the stuff was squirted up into the sky through a specially shaped nozzle. It

would be shot off soon after night-fall, and when the cloud of sodium rose out of the Moon's shadow into direct sunlight it would start to glow with tremendous brilliance.

Night-fall on the Moon is one of the most awe-inspiring sights in the whole of nature, made doubly so because as you watch the sun's flaming disc creep so slowly below the mountains you know that it will be fourteen days before you see it again. But it does not bring darkness—at least, not on this side of the Moon. There is always the Earth, hanging motionless in the sky, the one heavenly body that neither rises nor sets. The light pouring back from her clouds and seas floods the lunar landscape with a soft, blue-green radiance, so that it is often easier to find your way around at night than under the fierce glare of the sun.

Even those who were not supposed to be on duty had come out to watch the experiment. The sodium bomb had been placed at the middle of the big triangle formed by the three ships, and stood upright with its nozzle pointing at the stars. Dr. Anderson, the astronomer of the American team, was testing the firing circuits, but everyone else was at a respectful distance. The bomb looked perfectly capable of living up to its name, though it was really about as dangerous as a soda-water syphon.

All the optical equipment of the three expeditions seemed to have been gathered together to record the performance. Telescopes, spectroscopes, motion picture cameras and everything else one could think of were lined up ready for action. And this, I knew, was nothing compared to the battery that must be zeroed on us from Earth. Every amateur astronomer who could see the Moon tonight would be standing by in his back garden, listening to the radio commentary which told him of the progress of the experiment. I glanced up at the gleaming planet that dominated the sky above me; the land areas seemed to be fairly free from cloud, so the folk at home should have a good view. That seemed only fair; after all, they were footing the bill.

There were still fifteen minutes to go. Not for the first time,

I wished there were a reliable way of smoking a cigarette inside a spacesuit without getting the helmet so badly fogged that you couldn't see. Our scientists had solved so many much more difficult problems; it seemed a pity that they couldn't do something about *that* one.

To pass the time—for this was an experiment where I had nothing to do—I switched on my suit radio and listened to Dave Bolton, who was making a very good job of the commentary. Dave was our chief navigator, and a brilliant mathematician. He also had a glib tongue and a picturesque turn of speech, and sometimes his recordings had to be censored by the B.B.C. There was nothing they could do about this one, however, for it was going out live on Earth.

Dave had finished a brief and lucid explanation of the purpose of the experiment, describing how the cloud of glowing sodium would enable us to analyse the lunar atmosphere as it rose through it at approximately a thousand miles an hour. "However," he went on to tell the waiting millions on Earth, "let's make one point clear. Even when the bomb has gone off, you won't see a darn thing for ten minutes—and neither will we. The sodium cloud will be completely invisible while it's rising up through the darkness of the Moon's shadow. Then, quite suddenly, it will flash into brilliance as it enters the sun's rays, which are streaming past over our heads right now as we stare up into space. No one is quite sure how bright it will be, but it's a pretty safe guess that you'll be able to see it in any telescope bigger than a two-inch. So it should just be within the range of a good pair of binoculars."

He had to keep this sort of thing up for another ten minutes, and it was a marvel to me how he managed to do it. Then the great moment came, and Anderson closed the firing circuit. The bomb started to cook, building up pressure inside as the sodium volatilised. After thirty seconds, there was a sudden puff of smoke from the long, slender nozzle pointing up at the sky. And then we had to wait for another ten minutes while the invisible cloud rose to the

stars. After all this build-up, I told myself, the result had better be good.

The seconds and minutes ebbed away. Then a sudden yellow glow began to spread across the sky, like a vast and unwavering aurora that became brighter even as we watched. It was as if an artist were sprawling strokes across the stars with a flame-filled brush. And as I stared at those strokes, I suddenly realised that someone had brought off the greatest advertising *coup* in history. For the strokes formed letters, and the letters formed two words—the name of a certain soft drink too well-known to need any further publicity from me.

How had it been done? The first answer was obvious. Someone had placed a suitably cut stencil in the nozzle of the sodium bomb, so that the stream of escaping vapour had shaped itself to the words. Since there was nothing to distort it, the pattern had kept its shape during its invisible ascent to the stars. I had seen sky-writing on Earth, but this was something on a far larger scale. Whatever I thought of them, I couldn't help admiring the ingenuity of the men who had perpetrated the scheme. The O's and A's had given them a bit of trouble, but the C's and the L were perfect.

After the initial shock, I am glad to say that the scientific programme proceeded as planned. I wish I could remember how Dave Bolton rose to the occasion in his commentary; it must have been a strain even for his quick wits. By this time, of course, half the Earth could see what he was describing. The next morning, every newspaper on the planet carried that famous photo of the crescent Moon with the luminous slogan painted across its darkened sector.

The letters were visible, before they finally dispersed into space, for over an hour. By that time the words were almost a thousand miles long, and were beginning to get blurred. But they were still readable until they at last faded from sight in the ultimate vacuum between the planets.

Then the real fireworks began. Commander Vandenburg was absolutely furious, and promptly started to grill all his

men. However, it was soon clear that the saboteur—if you could call him that—had been back on Earth. The bomb had been prepared there and shipped ready for immediate use. It did not take long to find, and fire, the engineer who had carried out the substitution. He couldn't care less, since his financial needs had been taken care of for a good many years to come.

As for the experiment itself, it was completely successful from the scientific point of view; all the recording instruments worked perfectly as they analysed the light from the unexpectedly shaped cloud. But we never let the Americans live it down, and I am afraid poor Captain Vandenburg was the one who suffered most. Before he came to the Moon he was a confirmed teetotaler, and much of his refreshment came from a certain wasp-waisted bottle. But now, as a matter of principle, he can drink only beer—and he hates the stuff.

VI: A QUESTION OF RESIDENCE

I HAVE already described the—shall we say—jockeying for position before takeoff on the first flight to the Moon. As it turned out, the American, Russian and British ships landed simultaneously. No one has ever explained, however, why the British explorers came back nearly two weeks after the others.

Oh, I know the official story; I ought to, for I helped to concoct it. It is true as far as it goes, but it scarcely goes far enough.

On all counts, the joint expedition had been a triumphant success. There had been only one casualty, and in the manner of his death Vladimir Surov had made himself immortal. We had gathered knowledge which would keep the scientists of Earth busy for generations, and which would revolutionise almost all our ideas concerning the nature of the universe around us. Yes, our five months on the Moon had been well-

spent, and we would go home to such welcomes as few heroes had ever had before.

However, there was still a good deal of tidying up to be done. The instruments that had been scattered all over the lunar landscape were still busily recording, and much of the information they gathered could not be automatically radioed back to Earth. There was no point in all three of the expeditions staying on the Moon to the last minute; the personnel of one would be sufficient to finish the job. But who would volunteer to be caretaker while the others went back to gain the glory? It was a difficult problem, but one that would have to be solved very soon.

As far as supplies were concerned, we had little to worry about. The automatic freight rockets could keep us provided with air, food and water for as long as we wished to stay on the Moon. We were all in good health, though a little tired. None of the anticipated psychological troubles had cropped up, perhaps because we had all been so busy on tasks of absorbing interest that we had had no time to worry about going crazy. But, of course, we all looked forward to getting back to Earth and seeing our families again.

The first change of plan was forced upon us by the *Tsiolkovski's* being put out of commission, when the ground beneath one of her landing legs suddenly gave way. The ship managed to stay upright, but the hull was badly twisted and the pressure cabin sprang dozens of leaks. There was much debate about on-the-spot repairs, but it was decided that it would be far too risky for her to take off in this condition. The Russians had no alternative but to thumb lifts back in the *Goddard* and the *Endeavour*; by using the *Tsiolkovski's* unwanted fuel, our ships would be able to manage the extra load. However, the return flight would be extremely cramped and uncomfortable for all concerned as everyone would have to eat and sleep in shifts.

Either the American or the British ship, therefore, would be the first back to Earth. During those final weeks, as the work of the expedition was brought to its close, relations

between Commander Vandenburg and myself were somewhat strained. I even wondered if we ought to settle the matter by tossing for it. . . .

Another problem was also engaging my attention—that of crew discipline. Perhaps this is too strong a phrase; I would not like it to be thought that a mutiny ever seemed probable. But all my men were now a little abstracted and liable to be found, if off-duty, scribbling furiously in corners. I knew exactly what was going on, for I was involved in it myself. There wasn't a human being on the Moon who had not sold exclusive rights to some newspaper or magazine, and we were all haunted by approaching deadlines. The radio-teletype to Earth was in continuous operation, sending tens of thousands of words a day, while even larger slabs of deathless prose were being dictated over the speech circuits.

It was Professor Williams, our very practically minded astronomer, who came to me one day with the answer to my main problem.

"Skipper," he said, balancing himself precariously on the all-too-collapsible table I used as my working desk inside the igloo, "there's no technical reason, is there, why we should get back to Earth first?"

"No," I said, "merely a matter of fame, fortune and seeing our families again. But I admit those aren't technical reasons. We could stay here another year if Earth kept sending supplies. If you want to suggest that, however, I shall take great pleasure in strangling you."

"It's not as bad as that. Once the main body has gone back, whichever party is left can follow in two or three weeks at the latest. They'll get a lot of credit, in fact, for self-sacrifice, modesty and similar virtues."

"Which will be very poor compensation for being second home."

"Right—we need something else to make it worth while. Some more material reward."

"Agreed. What do you suggest?"

Williams pointed to the calendar hanging on the wall in

front of me, between the two pin-ups we had stolen from the *Goddard*. The length of our stay was indicated by the days that had been crossed off in red ink; a big question mark in two weeks' time showed when the first ship would be heading back to Earth.

"There's your answer," he said. "If we go back then, do you realise what will happen? I'll tell you."

He did, and I kicked myself for not having thought of it first.

The next day, I explained my decision to Vandenburg and Krasnin.

"We'll stay behind and do the mopping up," I said. "It's a matter of common sense. The *Goddard's* a much bigger ship than ours and can carry an extra four people, while we can only manage two more, and even then it will be a squeeze. If you go first, Van, it will save a lot of people eating their hearts out here for longer than necessary."

"That's very big of you," replied Vandenburg. "I won't hide the fact that we'll be happy to get home. And it's logical, I admit, now that the *Tsiolkovski's* out of action. Still, it means quite a sacrifice on your part, and I don't really like to take advantage of it."

I gave an expansive wave.

"Think nothing of it," I answered. "As long as you boys don't grab all the credit, we'll take our turn. After all, we'll have the show here to ourselves when you've gone back to Earth."

Krasnin was looking at me with a rather calculating expression, and I found it singularly difficult to return his gaze.

"I hate to sound cynical," he said, "but I've learned to be a little suspicious when people start doing big favours without very good reasons. And frankly, I don't think the reason you've given is good enough. You wouldn't have anything else up your sleeve, would you?"

"Oh, very well," I sighed. "I'd hoped to get a *little* credit, but I see it's no use trying to convince anyone of the purity of my motives. I've got a reason, and you might as well

know it. But please don't spread it around; I'd hate the folks back on Earth to be disillusioned. They still think of us as noble and heroic seekers after knowledge; let's keep it that way, for all our sakes."

Then I pulled out the calendar, and explained to Vandenburg and Krasnin what Williams had already explained to me. They listened with scepticism, then with growing sympathy.

"I had no idea it was *that* bad," said Vandenburg at last.

"Americans never have," I said sadly. "Anyway, that's the way it's been for half a century, and it doesn't seem to get any better. So you agree with my suggestion?"

"Of course. It suits us fine, anyhow. Until the next expedition's ready, the Moon's all yours."

I remembered that phrase, two weeks later, as I watched the *Goddard* blast up into the sky towards the distant, beckoning Earth. It was lonely, then, when the Americans and all but two of the Russians had gone. We envied them the reception they got, and watched jealously on the TV screens their triumphant processions through Moscow and New York. Then we went back to work, and bided our time. Whenever we felt depressed, we would do little sums on bits of paper and would be instantly restored to cheerfulness.

The red crosses marched across the calendar as the short terrestrial days went by—days which seemed to have very little connexion with the slow cycle of lunar time. At last we were ready; all the instrument readings were taken, all the specimens and samples safely packed away aboard the ship. The motors roared into life, giving us for a moment the weight we would feel again when we were back in Earth's gravity. Below us the rugged lunar landscape, which we had grown to know so well, fell swiftly away; within seconds we could see no sign at all of the buildings and instruments we had so laboriously erected and which future explorers would one day use.

The homeward voyage had begun; we returned to Earth in uneventful discomfort, joined the already half-dismantled

Goddard beside Space Station Three, and were quickly ferried down to the world we had left seven months before.

Seven months: that, as Williams had pointed out, was the all-important figure. We had been on the Moon for more than half a financial year—and for all of us, it had been the most profitable year of our lives.

Sooner or later, I suppose, this interplanetary loophole will be plugged; the Department of Inland Revenue is still fighting a gallant rearguard action, but we seem neatly covered under Section 57, paragraph 8 of the Capital Gains Act of 1972. We wrote our books and articles on the Moon—and until there's a lunar government to impose income tax, we're hanging on to every penny.

And if the ruling finally goes against us—well, there's always Mars. . . .

It's only within the past few months that writers have begun to spell the name Tsiolkovski sensibly in English, and a word of explanation may be in order. Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovski (1857-1935), the great pioneer of spaceflight theory, spelled his name with the Russian letter which is pronounced like our ts. German writers naturally transliterated this by Z, which has the ts sound in German. Englishmen and Americans have lazily imitated the Teutonic spelling, thereby giving readers a quite false idea of the pronunciation of the name. (Perhaps in the rational future foreseen by science fiction, we may eventually—in the same remote millenium when we conquer the common cold—replace the cumbersome German Tschaikowski with the simple and accurate English Chaikovski. At least we may be thankful that we have not taken the spelling of Khrushchev from German, in which it would be Chruschtschew!—A.B.

FREDRIC BROWN

After the lunar explorations described by Mr. Clarke comes the next great step onward: the first expedition to Mars. Fredric Brown gives us a brief but significant note on this venture, and titles it, with conciseness and meaning:

EXPEDITION

"THE FIRST major expedition to Mars," said the history professor, "the one which followed the preliminary exploration by one-man scout ships and aimed to establish a permanent colony, led to a great number of problems. One of the most perplexing of which was: How many men and how many women should comprise the expedition's personnel of thirty?"

"There were three schools of thought on the subject.

"One was that the ship should be comprised of fifteen men and fifteen women, many of whom would no doubt find one another suitable mates and get the colony off to a fast start.

"The second was that the ship should take twenty-five men and five women—ones who were willing to sign a waiver on monogamous inclinations—on the grounds that five women could easily keep twenty-five men sexually happy and twenty-five men could keep five women even happier.

"The third school of thought was that the expedition should contain thirty men, on the grounds that under those

circumstances the men would be able to concentrate on the work at hand much better. And it was argued that since a second ship would follow in approximately a year and could contain mostly women, it would be no hardship for the men to endure celibacy that long. Especially since they were used to it; the two Space Cadet schools, one for men and one for women, rigidly segregated the sexes.

"The Director of Space Travel settled this argument by a simple expedient. He—Yes, Miss Ambrose?" A girl in the class had raised her hand.

"Professor, was that expedition the one headed by Captain Maxon? The one they called Mighty Maxon? Could you tell us how he came to have that nickname?"

"I'm coming to that, Miss Ambrose. In lower schools you have been told the story of the expedition, but not the *entire* story; you are now old enough to hear it.

"The Director of Space Travel settled the argument, cut the Gordian knot, by announcing that the personnel of the expedition would be chosen by lot, regardless of sex, from the graduating classes of the two space academies. There is little doubt that he personally favored twenty-five men to five women—because the men's school had approximately five hundred in the graduating class and the women's school had approximately one hundred. By the law of averages the ratio of winners should have been five men to one woman.

"However, the law of averages does not always work out on any one particular series. And it so happened that on this particular drawing, *twenty-nine* women drew winning chances, and only *one* man won.

"There were loud protests from almost everyone except the winners, but the Director stuck to his guns; the drawing had been honest and he refused to change the status of any of the winners. His only concession to appease male egos was to appoint Maxon, the one man, captain. The ship took off and had a successful voyage.

"And when the second expedition landed, they found the population doubled. Exactly doubled—every woman mem-

EXPEDITION

ber of the expedition had a child, and one of them had twins, making a total of exactly thirty infants.

"Yes, Miss Ambrose, I see your hand, but please let me finish. No, there is nothing spectacular about what I have thus far told you. Although many people would think loose morals were involved, it is no great feat for one man, given time, to impregnate twenty-nine women.

"What gave Captain Maxon his nickname is the fact that work on the second ship went much faster than scheduled and the second expedition did not arrive one year later, but only nine months and two days later.

"Does that answer your question, Miss Ambrose?"

G. C. EDMONDSON

This marks the first appearance in book form of a relative newcomer to science fiction, who has been publishing a number of distinctive stories (mostly in F & SF) during the past year or two. Mr. Edmondson is an American of Scottish descent who has lived long enough in Mexico to become bilingual and bicultural. Now settled in San Diego, he has an enviably beautiful beard, an even more enviably beautiful wife, four children, and the happy faculty of never sounding like any writer but himself.

RESCUE

JASON DID not panic. Like any miner, he considered the explosion a normal hazard of the trade. Most of the colony was underground at the time. Those on the surface pitched in to dig out the rest. When time dragged beyond known limits of air supplies there was no point in further digging. Corpses don't care whether they're buried in one part of Mars or another. But Jason did.

He was one of those tall, craggy men who even in youth have an imperishable quality. Unlike most of the miners who were lured by high hopes of adventure, he came only for the money. With enough of it he could continue the solitary aimless course which life had led him since an overloaded school bus's inability to float had liberated Jason from his eldest son's promise to a worn, dying widow. Even before

that he'd never been much of a talker. The other miners liked him but they didn't quite understand the taciturn crawler driver.

For the company it was the final straw. The first Martian expedition had gotten a bigger welcome home than Columbus did. Few people read through the reams of romantic slush to know it had been a bust. Mars wasn't worth exploring. The second expedition blasted off on the momentum of a wave of popular sentiment, adroitly whipped up by a news syndicate manager. What did he care if another megabuck of the taxpayers money went down the drain, or rather, up in smoke? It wasn't costing him anything and it did sell papers.

The second expedition found one radioactive deposit of doubtful value. A Wall Street wonder boy organized a shaky company and that was how the mine came to be. For five years it had continued a precarious existence, metallic fuels production barely paying the truly colossal cost of equipment supply.

Surface air was deficient in oxygen and too thin to make compression practicable. Had it not been for huge gas pockets which a lesser gravity had formed with a prodigality unknown on Earth, the mine would have been bankrupt long ago.

Albert Jason was subconsciously aware of all these facts but he hadn't been thinking of them at the moment of the explosion. He had been dragging a string of cars through "A" tunnel on the western side of the mountain. The seasonal rush at opposition had left a small mountain of supplies on the field. The last ship of the season was still unloading and Jason was in a hurry to get things underground before a sandstorm complicated the job.

When the first shock wave spattered a mitrailleusade of gravel over his pressurized tractor cab he slipped his breathing mask on automatically. The second, third and fourth shock waves passed through tunnel "A" in a succession of rapid flutters but Jason didn't feel them. When he came to

he had a splitting headache and the tractor was still running, its treads biting vainly at the dusty air of the tunnel.

He dazedly shut off the drive and sat on the cab ceiling. The dust made visibility poor as he listened in the sudden silence of the stopped motor for falling rock. There was a grinding crunch as a piece the size of a small house hit the tractor a glancing blow and rolled away with the sedate motion peculiar to Martian gravity. He waited a few minutes but nothing else happened. The cabin was still pressurized. He radared a random pattern and discovered that he was blocked in both directions. No telling what a movement would do to the precarious balance in the tunnel. He decided to wait.

There was apparatus in the mine to analyze geological strains. He had supplies of food, water, and air on the battered cars. They'd have him out in less than a week. Meanwhile, the batteries would operate more efficiently in an upright position. After a look at the inverted bed and galley Jason decided he would too. Legs extended from the tractor and it righted like an agile scarab. He listened anxiously for falling rock but nothing happened.

Six men stood at the mouth of tunnel "B." One was the pilot of the last rocket. "Not exactly a triumphal return," he said glumly.

"Five out of fifty," one of the miners replied. "You won't find me sentimental about leaving. What'd the microwave have to say?"

"The company's tossing in the sponge. We'll be paid off. Their families will collect for the full term of their contracts." He gestured at the blocked tunnel.

"Better get a move on," the pilot said. "We're eight days past opposition already."

A miner pulled the crystals and power pack from the microwave transmitter. "Only things light enough to be worth the freight back home," he explained. They packed small bags of personal belongings and climbed into a tractor for the trip

RESCUE

around the mountain to tunnel "A" where the ship was waiting. Nobody looked back.

Blastoff dropped another slow-motion shower of rubble on Jason's tractor but he was asleep and didn't hear it. The air got a little ripe as he slept and his fogginess made him slipshod about adjusting it. It was nearly a week before he realized what was happening and took a benzedrine pill. When the air was working properly he sat down and took stock of the situation.

He wasn't sure of the time. That was one of the minor inconveniences of life on Mars. He had revamped his own calendar watch, putting in a slightly longer hairspring and running the slow adjustment to the peg. Still, it didn't work very well. Radar and seismograph recordings showed no signs of activity. He waited another day, then, with a cautious eye on the overhead, he began digging.

Digging out wasn't as easy as it looked. First, he had to pass the string of eighteen cars over, under, or around the tractor before he could get at the face of the blockage. It took a day to dig a chamber large enough to do this. He wished he'd had the luck to be caught in a digger. The supply tractor had digging tools on its face as did all Martian vehicles but they were not designed for heavy digging, only to dig out after sandstorms.

The total length of tunnel "A" was one thousand meters. He had been about two-thirds of the way in when the explosion occurred. Radar and seismograph had no way of telling how far the tunnel was blocked. At worst he'd have to dig through six hundred meters of rubble. He started digging, hoping the tractor would outlast the blockage.

Two days and a hundred meters farther he broke into a free section. The tractor raced ahead at its ten-kilometer top speed until he was within a hundred meters of the entrance. There the tunnel was blocked again. He weighed the air capacity of the tractor cab against the remaining distance and went back for the abandoned train. It was another day

before he had his supply train with him again. Thus prepared, he started digging. In thirty minutes he saw a faint gegenschein of daylight ahead.

The trip around to the bubble at the entrance of tunnel "B" took another half hour. He noted the absence of ships at the field but that was natural. The season had been ending when he was trapped. The first jolt came when he opened the Bubbletown airlock and found nobody home. For an instant Jason stood riveted, remembering the time he'd led brothers and sister from the ceremony whose barbarism was heightened by his knowledge that the casket's sleazy lining ended just beyond view. He remembered the wide-eyed way the kids had looked from empty kitchen to him and back to empty rocking chair.

Jason decided everybody had been in the mine. Must have happened just after the supply ship blasted off or the crew would have made some attempt at rescue. Or would they? With opposition season ending, he wondered. Anyhow, Jason was stuck for an Earth year, more or less, until next opposition. He went back to the bubble and began storing supplies. One year's supplies for fifty men. Or fifty years for one man.

The first month he was busy. Winter was due in this hemisphere and winter on Mars entailed much more preparation than it had in Wisconsin. Jason thought fleetingly of the lonely farm on Earth but he was too busy for morbid nostalgia.

In time everything was put away. He checked the dome for leaks and patched a couple of doubtful spots where sandstorms had eroded the plastic. The wear was slight. Aside from meteors—only slightly more probable here than on Earth—he was safe.

During the long Martian winter he began checking other less urgent things. Up to now he had avoided the other men's quarters from some sense of impropriety. Now he began to get their effects in order for the day when the ship came. Forty-five cubicles were as their occupants had left them to

spend twelve hours in the mine. The other five weren't. Hurrried departure was evident in the things that were missing.

With a prickliness about the neck and shoulders he entertained a new idea. When he saw the missing crystals and power pack in the uninspected microwave transmitter his suspicions were verified. He rummaged through the library for spools on electronics.

In time he repaired the transmitter, clumsily replacing the crystals with more primitive stabilizing devices. Power was available from the large pack which maintained the bubble but when he tried it something was lacking. After a week of transmitting and receiving no reply he gave up. He had better luck with the P.A. system. No parts had been pirated from it. He spent several months working out small improvements on a stereophonic sound system. His thirtieth birthday passed unnoticed as he listened to a tape of Berlioz while puttering around with the hydroponic tanks, trying to improve the lettuce.

At times he wished for a dog or a cat but in the end decided it was better this way. There was no worry about what would happen to a pet when something happened to Jason.

Days passed swiftly. His calendar watch gaye up the ghost and he was too busy to fix it. The roses weren't doing well in the Martian soil he had brought from outside the bubble. By the time they were transplanted to where they'd catch the anemic morning sunlight he'd lost track of time and there wasn't much point in fixing the watch. Besides, there was the model railroad he wanted to set up in the area where living quarters used to be.

The hydroponic tanks had yielded a small harvest of wheat and rye and he was busy firing brick. Jason hoped to duplicate the loaves he had eaten on Earth as a boy. First he had to make a mill and an oven. He noticed in an offhand way that his hairline was receding and the curly golden mat on his chest was showing tinges of gray.

On Earth economics boomed and busted. Wars grew hot, cold and lukewarm. News went through its hot seasons, its silly seasons and its doldrums. It was during the latter that the manager of a news syndicate, the same one who used to tub-thump about Martian exploitation, called in his star reporter.

"Rawson, how'd you like to take a trip?" he asked.

"Expense account?"

The chief nodded. "It's been nearly seven years since Mars was abandoned. How'd you like to do something on the ghost town?"

"But, chief," the reporter protested, "you know how much it costs to land on Mars."

"Who said anything about landing? You'll take a moon-shot and another ship from there. Orbit once or twice around Mars, shoot a few hundred feet of film over Bubbletown, and you're back in six months. It won't cost half as much for the trip from Luna to Mars as it does from here to Luna."

The ship orbited thirty miles above Jason's head as he was firing brick. The reporter was using a telephoto lens and didn't see Jason. If Jason had thought of looking up he wouldn't have been able to see the ship.

Clay had been something of a problem to Jason. He hadn't been sure of how well the Martian clays would fire until he remembered the vitrified rubble tossed up whenever a ship took off in the old days. He pondered about fueling the oven too. Experiments proved that some of the Martian bushes would burn well and didn't leave an offensive taste in the bread, but Jason didn't have the air to spare for burning them. In the end he reluctantly fired his oven electrically. The bubble's solar batteries furnished plenty of power.

About the time he was removing his first batch of bread from the oven a man on Earth was reading a letter which had run the gauntlet through progressively more critical

readers and eventually landed in the sanctum sanctorum, a basket on his desk.

Dear Sir:

I read your series of articles on Bubbletown with great interest since my husband was one of the survivors. When I called his attention to the article he took one look at the pictures and said, "Hogwash! That's not Bubbletown!"

I don't intend to tell you how to run your business but do you think it sporting to deliberately perpetrate a hoax on the reading public?

Sincerely,

Anna K. Wilson

"Get Rawson in here!" the man roared. Across the room a picture fell from the wall.

"Yes, sir," a secretary replied through the squawk box.

"What is it, chief?" the reporter asked a few minutes later. The chief passed the letter to him wordlessly.

Rawson read the letter and handed it back. "Some crank," he said. "Why the excitement?"

"You mean you can stand there with a straight face and tell me you didn't spend six months getting drunk in some dive on the moon and faking a bunch of pictures?"

Rawson stared in astonishment. "I can produce dozens of witnesses to prove these prints are genuine," he said quietly.

The chief glared at him suspiciously. "Then how do you account for this?" he waved the letter.

"I don't know unless—"

They looked at each other in shocked silence.

"My God!" the chief breathed. "It'll make the biggest story since Robinson Crusoe."

Rawson compared the pictures he had taken with earlier shots hastily summoned from the morgue. "Whoever he is, he's sure fixed the place up. Look at that brickwork. Looks like a garden over there."

"Well, he's had plenty of time."

Four of the five Bubbletown survivors were still alive. With Rawson's help they reconstructed the day of the explosion. Eventually somebody remembered what Albert Jason had been doing that morning, and other details fell rapidly into place.

The news syndicate played the story for all it was worth and a rescue expedition was organized. Opposition season was due in another month. When it came a ship was ready.

When the ship sat down at the entrance to tunnel "A" on the opposite side of the mountain from Bubbletown, Jason was asleep. Rocket noise carried less than a half kilometer in the thin Martian air, and seismic shock was absorbed in the stack of mattresses which comprised Jason's bed. His first warning was a whoosh of lowering air pressure as a crowd of excited rescuers came boiling through the airlock.

So many people made him nervous after years of uninterrupted calm. He wished irritably that they wouldn't all talk at once.

"Say something for the people on Earth." Someone thrust a microphone in his face. Jason eyed it with distaste.

"I can't think of anything to say," he said finally. His voice sounded strange in his ears. He had gotten out of the habit of talking and singing to himself. It used to make him feel lonely.

They scattered about the dome, admiring his model railway and trampling his roses. Someone emerged from the hydroponic section with a fistful of half-grown rye. "What's this weed?" he shouted at Jason.

Someone photographed the oven from various angles and smeared lampblack over the gleaming brass door handle when a reflection threatened to fog one of his pictures. A man thrust a bottle at Jason and laughed uproariously when he choked and sputtered at the unaccustomed taste of whisky.

Several of the more boisterous finally went back to the ship to sleep. Jason said he'd used all the bedding and mat-

tresses up in various projects. The others straggled out one by one. The pilot stayed longest.

"What's it really like on Earth?" Jason asked. They sat in overstuffed chairs of Jason's manufacture, drinking his home-brewed ale and munching on his rye bread with mustard and Swiss cheese.

The pilot thought a moment. "You didn't leave a wife or anything like that, did you?" he asked.

Jason shook his head. "Parents dead too," he added.

"Well," the pilot said, "I'm stationed on Luna. Don't get down to Earth very often. Two days in that gravity and my feet are killing me." He hesitated, trying to envision the changes wrought in the last seven years. "There's a new president. Automobiles are a little faster. Juvenile delinquency's a little higher. Population too. I guess that's about it," he concluded.

Jason sat sipping his ale. He finished it and reached into the humidor. They lit cigars and smoked in companionable silence.

"They'll never let you, you know," the pilot said after a while.

Jason looked up quickly.

The pilot gazed at the glowing tip of his cigar. "If I stayed they'd stay too. I'll have to take them back. It wouldn't work for two anyway," he said regretfully. "We'd be at each other's throats in six months."

"Yes, I suppose so," Jason said.

"They'll take you home, make no mistake. You'll go quietly or you'll go in a strait jacket. Well, guess I'd better be getting back to the ship. Nice to have met you." He held out his hand.

Jason shook it and saw him to the airlock. He went back to the fireplace where electric elements simulated glowing coals amid his handmade bricks. When the cigar was finished he went around the bubble, gathering things he might need. He put them into the tractor and drove it through the airlock. He sealed the airlock carefully and drove into the entrance of tunnel "B." There he planted a small explosive charge and

detonator. He drove in another hundred meters and sent a radar beam into the detonator.

Seismic shock traveled through the hard Martian soil and up the landing stilts into the ship. The others went on sleeping. The pilot released a tremendous sigh but it was a long time before he slept.

Three days later they left. The rubble in the entrance of tunnel "B" made it only too evident what had happened. The pilot stood briefly before the tunnel with his hat in his hand, then turned and followed the others.

Jason waited until he felt the seismic wave of the ship's blastoff. It took him a full day to dig out. The airlock of Bubbletown gaped open. Jason drove the tractor in and gazed sickly at his roses. With luck he might bring some of them out of the frost blight. He closed the airlock and began building pressure from the reserve tanks. In the hydroponic section the lettuce was totally ruined. It would be months before he would have a new crop from seed. The wheat and rye were drooping.

They had rifled his symphonic collection for souvenirs. The Berlioz tapes were nearly all gone. Drifting sand had gritted its way through the airlock into his curtains. The hand-embroidered spread on his bed was gone.

"*The dirty bastards,*" he mumbled. Then he remembered there was no one to hear him.

CHAD OLIVER

Ecology, that branch of biology dealing with the relations between living organisms and their environment, is a science rarely employed as the s. in s.f.; the only well-known example that comes to mind is George Stewart's EARTH ABIDES. Now Chad Oliver demonstrates that, when men of Earth are forced to violate both law and ethics in order to save an alien race from extinction, the situation demands the combined talents of the anthropologist and the ecologist. But above and beyond the questions of science, as Oliver never fails to realize, "People are the problem. They always are. . . ."

BETWEEN THE THUNDER AND THE SUN

*And least of all he holds the human swarm—
Unwitting now that envious men prepare
To make their dream and its fulfillment one.
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
His roads between the thunder and the sun.*

George Sterling

IT BEGAN as a perfectly ordinary day.

Evan Schaefer woke up a little after nine in the morning, which meant that he was a few minutes behind schedule and would have to hustle to make his first class on time.

That was normal; it happened to him every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Tuesday and Thursday were better, because he had no classes before noon.

He piled out of bed, noted that his wife Lee was still asleep, and stumbled blearily into the kitchen, where he punched the preset breakfast button. He yawned, decided that the house was a little on the cool side, and glanced into the scope. No one was below him. He flicked on the warning beam and lowered the house down to three thousand feet. Then he readjusted the window pattern for the prevailing wind system. A warm, balmy breeze drifted into the house. Golden sunlight touched the imitation redwood surfaces.

"Much better," Evan Schaefer muttered. He was proud of his house. They had had to cut corners on his professor's salary, but with the children gone—

He shut off the thought before the pain came.

He showered, dressed in his blue coverall, and did hurried justice to three poached eggs on toast, sausage links, and two cups of steaming fragrant coffee.

He glanced at his watch. It was going to be close. He knew he was forgetting something, but for a moment he couldn't place it. Something Bill had wanted . . .

Snapping his fingers, he ran up the curving ramp to his skylight study. His eyes ran over the shelves of books, tapes, and films.

"Boas, Boas," he said to himself. "Kwakiutl, Annual Report—"

The book should have been in the old Bureau of American Ethnology series, back around 1920. He found it finally, on the wrong shelf, in a microfilm edition.

He hurried back down the ramp and into the garage. The roof slid aside when he climbed into the copter cabin. He jetted up into the open sky and cut in the blades. The copter was too small for an antigravity unit, but he usually enjoyed the flight to the university.

Not when he was this late, however.

He took her up to the fast traffic lane and eased into the

stream. He flew for five minutes over the rich green forest and then landed on the roof of his university office. He ducked down into it, snatched up his notes from his cluttered desk, and rode the elevator down into the underground lecture hall.

He was three minutes late when he mounted the platform and faced the five hundred students and the TV pickup.

"Good morning," he said. "Where were we, anyhow?"

The blonde in the front row made a big occasion out of checking her notes. "Something about the Oedipus transfer," she said.

She pronounced it *Eddie-puss*, of course.

Schaefer nodded.

"We were talking about the shift in the locus of authority to the mother's brother in some societies with matrilineal descent," he said. "Now, you'll remember that when Malinowski . . ."

The rest was routine.

There was nothing at all to indicate that this day was different from any other day.

When the class was over and he had disposed of last-minute questions from the eager-beavers, he took the elevator back up to his office. He felt drained, as he always did after a lecture. It was precisely the same feeling an actor had after giving a performance.

The word was *limp*.

He needed a few minutes with his pipe, and then some coffee with Bill. After that, he could face his advanced class on multilinear cultural evolution—tougher than his introductory sections, but more stimulating for him.

He stuck his key in the lock, opened the door to his office, and stepped inside.

He stopped.

There was a man in his office. Schaefer had never seen him before. He didn't look like a student. The man was tall, with a face that might have been handsome had it not been

for the lines of strain around the full mouth. He was around fifty years old. There was an ashtray filled with cigarette butts by his right hand.

"Dr. Schaefer?" The voice was tense, as though the man were controlling it with difficulty.

"Well?" Schaefer was not alarmed, but he was annoyed.

"I would appreciate it if you locked the door," the man said.

"How did you get in here?"

"With a key."

Schaefer frowned, then checked the door. "It's locked."

The man relaxed, just a little. "My name is Benito Moravia," he said, and waited.

The name rang a vague bell, but Schaefer couldn't quite place it. He was reasonably sure that he had no Moravia in any of his classes, but then this man didn't have the look of a worried parent about him.

Moravia took a deep breath. "I'm head of the UN Extra-terrestrial Division," he said. "I thought you might have heard of me; I hope you'll excuse the vanity."

Schaefer snapped his fingers. "Of course!" He shook hands with Moravia. "You took me by surprise, sir."

"I meant to."

Schaefer eyed the man. He *was* worried about something. "What can I do for you?"

Moravia laughed, shortly. "First of all, you can swear to me that what I tell you in this room will never be passed on to a living soul without my permission." He spread his hands helplessly. "This damned melodrama, this secrecy, it makes me sick. I have no choice, do you see?"

Schaefer felt a tiny electric thrill tingling through him. He was suddenly not tired at all. He sat down at his desk and leaned forward in his swivel chair.

"Shoot," he said.

"This is confidential." Moravia looked at him with nervous brown eyes. "You swear to it?"

"If that's the way you want it," Schaefer said, feeling a

little silly. "What is it? Something about the Pollux stuff—they haven't gotten back yet, have they?"

"Not yet." Moravia shook his head. The light gleamed on his black hair. "The diplomatic mission won't return for another three years."

Schaefer fumbled for his pipe, stuck a cube of tobacco in it, and inhaled until he could taste the smoke. There was a taut emptiness in the pit of his stomach.

"You've got a new one."

Moravia didn't answer him directly. He reached behind him, to a table Schaefer kept in the office for students who had to take special exams, and picked up a heavy briefcase. He unlocked it, took some glossy three-dimensional photographs out of it. He handed them to Schaefer without a word.

Schaefer looked at the top one and swallowed hard.

Words weren't necessary.

There were no words.

A riot of color: green from chlorophyll, yellow and orange and violet from flowers, red-brown from the soil, blue from the sky.

Faces: a man's, a woman's, a boy's. Hesitant smiles, shyness, uncertainty. Darkish skins, wide eyes, tiny noses. Gray hair—no, it was fur, with white stripes in it. Canine teeth that gleamed in the light when mouths were opened.

Schaefer looked more closely. Diastema? He couldn't tell.

Bodies: very light, small-boned, with extremely long, graceful arms. The arms were longer than the legs.

"They're brachiators," Schaefer breathed.

Moravia nodded. "Yes, they often swing through the trees."

More pictures: caves, tents, thatched villages, adobe towns. Small fields planted with crops that looked like cereals. Some animals in corrals, ungainly mammals that were obviously milk-producers.

"Where is it?"

"Aldebaran. The fourth planet. One of the survey ships found it six years ago—the ship's been back five months now."

"Got a culture map?"

"Right here." Moravia slipped a sheet out of his case.

Schaefer studied it carefully. There were four large continental land masses and several big islands. The survey had been thorough on cultural distributions, although it was necessarily superficial in a trait-list sort of way. Most of the people clearly lived by hunting and gathering. There were three centers of agriculture; one continent seemed to lack it altogether.

There were no cities, although there were a number of large adobe towns in several areas. He checked the key with a sinking sensation. No writing. And no real working of metals, except for some raw copper.

He put down his pipe. "Damn," he said.

"Exactly," agreed Moravia. "We're stuck."

Schaefer got up and paced the floor. It was maddening. It was like glimpsing the promised land and then having the gate slammed in your face.

"No mistake, I suppose?"

"None."

Schaefer sat down again, clamped his pipe in his teeth. It had been rough enough when Pollux had been found, twelve years ago. That had been the first one, the first system with humanoid beings, the first positive evidence that man was not alone in the universe.

The end of a centuries-long search.

The fifth world of Pollux, twenty-nine light-years from Earth, had a civilization, as defined by law: urban centers, writing, advanced technology. They even had spaceships, although they had not yet perfected an interstellar drive.

Schaefer still remembered the excitement, the promise, the thrill of that discovery. He had prayed that he might be selected to go along with the diplomatic mission as part of the scientific project. He had been passed over. He told himself that he couldn't have gone anyway, couldn't have left the kids to grow up by themselves while he spent the im-

placable years it took to reach another star system and return—

He shut off the thought.

The kids were gone now.

It didn't matter anyway. Pollux V had had a civilization roughly comparable to Earth's, which made it simple under the law. Earth could contact them again, talk to them, trade with them.

Aldebaran's fourth planet was a different kettle of fish.

Schaefer knew the law, and approved of it. There had been enough powers in the UN that remembered their own status as one-time colonies so that the law was a foregone conclusion.

Earthman's Burden?

Hunt the natives down if they look a little different?

Round them up and herd them into reservations?

No, thanks!

The law was explicit. If a planet was found with humanoid beings who were not prepared to defend themselves technologically or legally, there was just one policy: *Hands Off*.

No trade, no exploitation, no scientific missions.

No blather about progress and underdeveloped areas.

No well-intentioned slaughter.

It was the great triumph of mercy in law: *Let 'em alone!*

Schaefer understood that law, and believed in it. He knew the whole sordid story, concealed for so long: Tasmanians hunted like animals until they were extinct, Africans crammed into stinking ships and sold as slaves, Polynesians ravaged by disease. American Indians shot for game and tortured by Spanish explorers and then virtually exterminated simply because they were in the way.

It was a good law, the best law.

He handed the photographs back.

"Too bad," he said. "But there are more important things than science."

Moravia looked at the floor. "Yes. I knew you'd see that. That's why I came to you."

Schaefer waited, his palms beginning to sweat.

Moravia glanced around the office, his quick eyes taking in the good oil painting on the wall, the novels stuck in between the monographs and tapes and journals on the shelves.

"You see the problem," he said slowly. "At least, you see part of it. We cannot go back to the Aldebaran system. It would be ethically and legally wrong." He smiled faintly. "And we'd both lose our jobs if anyone ever found out."

Schaefer stared at the man. "You're not suggesting—"

Moravia ignored him. "We can't go back. We dare not risk making an exception that might be the beginning of the end for millions of free people out there. It's unthinkable."

Schaefer waited, feeling as though he had one foot waving over a chasm, with the other about to follow.

Moravia slammed his fist down on the table with a suddenness that made them both jump.

"We've got to go back! Heaven help me, we've got to."

The chasm yawned below Schaefer, black and waiting.

"Let's have it," he said.

Moravia took a deep breath. "Those people out there are in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

Moravia met his eyes squarely. They were haunted eyes, tired eyes. "They're dying," he said.

Schaefer digested that one, slowly.

"All of them?"

"No. Just one area. Only a few hundred thousand people." There was just a trace of irony in Moravia's voice.

Schaefer drew on his pipe. He knew the score now. He wished desperately that Moravia had never walked into his office or his life.

"We could help them, is that it?"

"Looking at it simply as a problem to be solved, yes. We could save many of them, to say nothing of generations to come. There are people out there dying. We know the answer. Legally, we can't deliver it."

"And morally?"

"You tell me, Dr. Schaefer."

The two men sat in the office, staring at each other.

II

It was early evening when Schaefer lifted his copter from the roof of his university office. There was a fat yellow moon in the sky, dimming the brilliance of the stars. He jockeyed into the fast traffic lane, a river of blinking lights that swirled in the soft night air.

Below him there was another river, a winding ribbon of silver in the moon's rays. The river glided through darkness now; he could not see the green beds of the treetops or the wind-waves of the grassland meadows. But he could smell the freshness of it, the life of clear water and the peace of trees, and he was glad it was there.

Houses floated above him, warm splashes of light like fireflies in the dusk, and he thought, *Antigravity did much more than just give us the key to space—it gave us back our Earth.*

He remembered when he was a boy, walking in the green wonderland of the forest, building rock dams across chuckling little streams, and he was grateful for those memories. He was glad that people no longer dirtied the land with their cities, and thankful that men had headed off the pollution of the Earth while there was yet time.

It had been close, too close.

It was so easy to turn grasslands to dust, forests to eroding mud-flats, flowers to steel, rivers to sewers.

He looked up at the faint stars, almost hidden by copterbugs and houses. *God, I wouldn't know Aldebaran if I were looking right at it.*

Schaefer had never been in space, not even to the moon.

He knew, though, that Aldebaran was fifty-three light-years away. That was a far piece, in any league. Even with

the interstellar drive, it would take a minimum of ten years, five years to get there, five to return. And it wouldn't be that simple.

He was no spaceman, his roots were in the Earth. His roots and his friends and his job. Ten or fifteen years was a big chunk out of a man's life. To be sure, *he* wouldn't age that much, not in the icebox, but everything on Earth would. Jim, Norm, Betty—they all would be past sixty before he returned. And in his own field he would be fifteen years behind. Fifteen years of journals . . .

And there was Lee.

He couldn't go without her.

What of her life? Would she be willing to go? Could she take it? He didn't attempt to kid himself about his wife. She was not as strong as she had been before they had lost their children. She had been an alcoholic for two years before they snapped her out of it.

He listened to the buzz of the copter in the night.

People are the problem. They always are.

He thought of Moravia's haunted eyes, and wondered.

His home loomed up below him, an island of green in a sea of twinkling lights.

Schaefer landed.

They sat on the couch together. The coffee was still hot in the heat-retaining cups on the imitation redwood table, but it was stale and bitter. Even the fresh night breeze could not completely clear away the film of smoke from the room, and the ashtrays were filled with his charred pipecubes and her lipstick-stained cigarette butts.

He was not tired. He was in that flat state of being wide awake, but knowing he had to get up in the morning for an early class. It was probably worse thinking about it now than it would be then.

It was three o'clock in the morning.

Lee had dark circles under her eyes, and there was a coffee stain on the blue silk of her robe. Her hair—a soft brown

that she referred to as a nothing color—tumbled down around her almost-thin shoulders.

Moravia's photographs, maps, and charts were scattered on the floor.

"It's up to you, Ev. You know that."

He shook his head. "It's up to both of us. Always has been. I fouled us up once; that's enough."

"Maybe." *Two youngsters playing by the stream. Danny with his dark, serious eyes. Sue, all laughter and sunshine. They'd wandered off; he hadn't seen them. He'd been too busy with that fat old trout he'd snagged once, and missed. He had never even heard the screams when the kids had gone out too far in the swift water. He had never known, until the man had come to him with the two limp shapes in his arms. . . .*

"I don't know what to do," he said. "He says he can fix it up, get me a leave, cover my tracks. But fifteen years is a long time, Lee. There'll be questions. I won't ever be able to tell anyone where I was. I'll get no thanks for what I do. I could very easily lose my job. Maybe these are selfish considerations, but what the hell. I'm no knight in shining armor."

She laughed, a friendly laugh. "Nobody ever accused us of being heroes," she admitted.

"There's more than that. I don't know what the *right* thing to do is. It's easy for some people—they always seem to know what's right and what's wrong. It's never been easy for me. I believe in that law. I want no part of colonies that take a world away from its own people. I want no part of that ignorant arrogance that assumes that our ways are right and all other ways wrong. If we go out there, if we set the precedent for whatever reason, then what happens the next time, and the next?"

"Careful," she said, touching him. "The knight is showing through the armor."

He flushed. "Damn it all. How about our friends? What would they think of us?"

Lee didn't answer. There was a silence, and then she said, "Ev, are you still worried about me?"

The question took him by surprise. "I don't know," he said honestly. "Should I be?"

"I won't let you down again."

"You never let me down, Lee."

She leaned over and picked up a picture from the floor. They had both looked at it many times. It was a photograph of a child. Not a human child, perhaps, but they never thought of that.

A big-eyed, skinny kid—skinny except where his belly was bloated with hunger.

A shy smile, not asking for anything, not even hoping.

Just a hungry kid.

"Moravia knew what that picture would do to us," he said, not without bitterness.

"We have to go," Lee said. "There isn't really any choice, not for us."

He said nothing, his chin in his hands.

Lee got up with a whisper of warm silk. "Come on, honey. It'll be a long day tomorrow."

He got up, his mind blank, and followed his wife into their bedroom.

The lights went out, and their home was dark, with only the warning beacons burning beneath the stars.

The semester was almost over, and Schaefer was busy with his preparations for final exams. Writing them was no trouble by now, but all the secondary side-effects took time. There were students who had missed lectures, and wanted to be filled in on a week's work in fifteen minutes. There were students who were failing, and wanted to pass. (*"I'll do anything, Dr. Schaefer, anything! If I don't make a good grade, I'll be disinherited!"*) There were students who absolutely had to be on the moon the day of the final, and couldn't they *please* take their exam with some other section?

It was funny, in a way, but life went on. His head was

spinning with unanswered questions and problems he could not discuss, but he still had a job to do.

He hadn't seen Moravia for almost a month.

And then, one afternoon, there he was, waiting in his office. He had another man with him—a small, wiry man, his dark hair shot with gray.

"Ah, Dr. Schaefer!" the little man said, cutting off Moravia's attempted introduction. "I am Tino Sandoval, your partner in crime." He smiled, showing very white, even teeth.

Schaefer shook his hand with genuine pleasure. "I've read your book, sir." He nodded toward a shelf and a title. *Spring Lake*.

"Excellent! Did you read it before or after you found out that you were going to have to work with me?"

"I read it years ago. It was wonderful."

Sandoval was flattered and embarrassed, and covered it with a flood of words. "It was a little thing. The critics in your country, they say I am a new Thoreau. He was from New England, I am a Mexican." He spread his hands in a thoroughly Latin gesture. "How can that be?"

Schaefer laughed, feeling more hopeful than he had felt in a long time. He knew that Sandoval was a top-notch ecologist, and he knew already that they would get along. That helped a lot.

"You two will have plenty of time to talk later," Moravia suggested, smiling. "Should we get down to business?"

"He has taken on your ways," Sandoval whispered loudly. "Always in a hurry! He wants to be an American."

Moravia lit a cigarette. If he resented Sandoval's remark, he gave no sign. "We're all set and the ship is ready," he said. "I can tell you that it wasn't easy."

He paused, searching for words.

"We talk a lot about spiritual values, about high purposes. Did you ever try to raise money, a lot of money, for a mercy mission—in secret, when the contributors can't even get a button for their money? When they know, absolutely, that

it will never benefit them in the slightest? When they know they are even breaking the law?"

He looked haggard, Schaefer thought. And his eyes were more haunted, more troubled, than ever.

"A lot of people had to know. The Security Council had to know. The governments of many countries had to know—unofficially, of course. You can't build a spaceship and launch it in your back yard. Too many people know, and it can't be helped. If anything goes wrong, if the word ever leaks, governments will fall. It is terrible how a thing like this can snowball."

"In other words," Schaefer said, "we've got a bull by the horns."

"Exactly. If you get into trouble, we can't help you. If you are successful, we can't even thank you in public."

"It does not make for high morale," Sandoval said. His voice was suddenly shrewd, stabbing. "Who is going with us?"

"You will have twenty UN men under your direction. They're intelligent and well-trained."

"Good. And the ship? Who will command the ship?"

Moravia seemed to hesitate, then spoke swiftly. "Admiral Hurley will have thirty officers and men under him."

Tino Sandoval stuck a cigarette in a holder, lit it, inhaled deeply. "And this Hurley? You have every confidence in him?"

This time Moravia did hesitate. "He's the best we could do," he said finally. "He knows his business."

"By business, you mean running a spaceship?"

"Yes."

Schaefer watched the two men fence with each other. He had been bothered by the same questions, but he was content to let Sandoval carry the ball.

"You have of course fed the situation and the personality components into a computer?"

"Certainly."

"And the prognosis is that it will all work out OK, probably?"

Moravia hesitated again. "Probably," he said. "Look here, Sandy! I'm in this thing as deep as you are—deeper, in fact."

"You're not going," Sandoval pointed out bluntly. "We are. I mean no offense. If we can't trust you, who can we trust?"

The question hung in the air. There was no answer to it.

Schaefer felt uncomfortable and tried to change the subject. He looked at Sandoval. "Is your wife going too?"

The little man laughed and jabbed his cigarette holder at the air. "My wife? That is a good one, Evan!"

"I'm sorry I assumed you were married—"

"Oh, do not be sorry, please! Is a man sorry because he has no chain around his neck?" His eyes twinkled. "There are many fish in the sea, Evan."

Moravia watched the two men with a curious expression in his eyes. Schaefer caught it, and wondered at it. Pride? Hope? Regret?

Evidently Sandoval also felt that it was time to let Moravia off the hook, for he steered the conversation into a new channel.

"My people, they were Indians not long ago," he said. "You are an anthropologist, Evan. Maybe you would like to study me?"

"I might learn something at that."

Sandoval laughed, and the room was free of tension.

"How long do we have, Ben?" Schaefer asked Moravia.

Moravia looked at him with dark, clouded eyes. "Three weeks," he said.

The three men fell silent.

Schaefer thought of a child's face, a child's hungry body.

That child would be dead by now, his solemn eyes forever closed.

But there were other children.

How many would die in three weeks?

How many would die in five years?

"Come on," he said. "There's lots to do."

III

The ship had a number, not a name.

It lifted away from the Earth on a column of silence, and yet the silence was filled with the tautness of power almost beyond comprehension. It lifted through rain and white clouds and blue skies, and then it was in the star-bright stillness where the winds never blew.

It passed the metallic doughnut of the old space station, useless now with antigrav takeoffs.

And then the heavily shielded atomics cut in with a hushed Niagara of sun-flame, and the journey had begun.

Schaefer and Lee and Sandoval sat in Sandy's room, which was hardly more than a big closet, and felt the immensity that surrounded them. It was the same feeling you had when you climbed to the top of a mountain and looked over the edge, down and down and down, but there was nothing to see.

There are no windows on spaceships.

They gradually relaxed, as the vibration of the atomics steadied and soothed. They looked at each other and spoke in low voices and thought about the icebox.

When they were four ship-days out, they knew it was time.

Admiral Hurley sent for them, as was the custom.

Until that moment, they had never met the man.

Hurley's cabin was not large, but it seemed spacious after their own. It was neat and clean and a trifle barren. There were pictures on the walls, all of ships: sailing craft leaning into the wind and spray, sharklike submarines surfacing into the sunlight, a shaft of steel against a lunar background, the squat mother-ship that had been the first to send her children for the touch-down on Mars.

The admiral was in full uniform. He was a tall, thin man, with a balding head that was pinkish in the light. His face was all sharp lines and crags; there was no softness in it.

His eyes were an icy green, as though they concealed a bitterness he had long ago learned to live with.

He was neither friendly nor unfriendly. He was scrupulously polite, holding a chair for Lee, and he gave an impression of a man who would do his duty although the world collapsed around him.

Hurley waited until they were all seated and uncomfortable, and then he spoke. Even talking to them, he kept his distance. He addressed them as a group, not as individuals.

"We're about to switch over to the inertialess drive. It is our custom on shipboard to drink a toast before any passenger goes into the icebox for the first time. It helps to keep you warm, over the years."

He smiled a wintry smile, and they all laughed politely. Schaefer was certain that the man had made the same little joke every single time he had gone through this ceremony. Still, he could not dislike the admiral. They were different kinds of people, and that was all.

Hurley produced a bottle of sherry and four surprisingly fragile glasses. He poured the drinks, raised his in a toast: "To a successful mission."

They sipped. Sherry is not the most powerful drink in the world, but it warmed things up a trifle.

"You understand, of course, about the icebox. There is nothing to fear. We have never had an accident. You will all be injected with shots—a substance derived from the lymphoid tissue of hibernating animals, an absorbent of vitamin D, insulin, some simple drugs. Then your body temperature will be chilled. All your bodily processes will be suspended, and you will actually age only a week or so in the five years it will take us to reach our destination."

He poured more sherry. None of this was news to Schaefer, but since Hurley was enjoying his role of giving the scientists some elementary facts he did not interrupt.

"Naturally," Hurley went on, "there will be men on duty at all times. I myself can be at my post within an hour if need be; that is part of our training. We work in relays of

several months each. Since you are civilians, you will not be called until we reach the Aldebaran system."

When he used the word *civilians* his voice was carefully neutral.

"We know we're in good hands, Admiral," Lee said, giving him her best smile. "We wish we could be of more help to you. We know this trip is not entirely to your liking."

Hurley thawed slightly, but did not reply.

Schaefer thought: *Ten years and more on a mission that must seem to him a mush-mouthed waste of time. Ten years to help some people he doesn't even think of as human. Ten years while others are out on the great adventure. Ten years with fuddy-duddy social scientists. No, Hurley doesn't relish this assignment—and who can blame him?*

"How many women are on this ship, Admiral?" Lee asked. "Some of the men seem a bit hungry, even when they look at an old crone like me."

Hurley took the bait, pouring some more sherry. "You're a most attractive woman, Mrs. Schaefer, if I may say so. I trust none of my men have—"

Lee blushed, synthetically. "Oh, no. They are perfect gentlemen. I'm just curious." She used her smile again.

"All the officers have their wives along," he said brusquely. "Privileges of rank, you know." He chuckled, and Schaefer decided that the admiral was probably a pretty good guy—in the Officers' Club, with other admirals.

"Isn't that—well, unstable?" asked Sandoval.

Hurley looked at him, and some of the ice came back. "There is only so much room on a spaceship, sir. And your party, with all the UN men, is taking up a good bit of it. The other men on this cruise were selected in part because they were unmarried. We had no choice."

Sandoval nodded, frowning.

"It isn't as bad as it seems, Mr. Sandoval. We're frozen most of the time, if I may remind you. On shipboard, the wives go along mainly so that there will be no age discrepancy when we return. There is no real problem—unless we have

to stay in the Aldebaran system over a protracted period of time. On that matter, of course, I am under your orders."

Schaefer grinned. "You tossed that one right back in our laps, sir."

"That's the way it is."

Hurley stood up, indicating that the meeting was adjourned.

Schaefer was curious about why the time-deceleration effect did not apply on shipboard, since they were moving faster than the speed of light. He had read an explanation somewhere, and knew that it had something to do with the nature of the drive, but was ashamed to ask about it. The admiral had little enough respect for him now, and if he didn't even know about *that* . . .

Lee's skin glowed with the sherry. "Sweet dreams," she said to Hurley as they left.

His door closed behind them.

Schaefer and Sandoval kept Lee between them as they walked. It was almost as though they were huddled together for warmth, and despite the fact that there was no change in the temperature inside the spaceship a cold wind seemed to blow through the sterile white corridors. . . .

"There is nothing to fear."

Whenever a man told him that, Schaefer knew that it was time to get worried.

They took them separately, to avoid scenes.

When a man saw his wife seem to die before his eyes, when her breathing slowed until he couldn't see it, when the frost began to form on the tips of her hair—

It was better not to watch.

Sandoval went first, smoking a last cigarette in his jaunty holder.

Then Lee. She smiled at him, and he was acutely aware that he still loved his wife after twenty years of marriage. She still caught at his heart, still made him want to reach out and touch her just to be sure she was there. It wasn't

just the hair or the eyes or the body. It was the warm certainty that she would understand, and her faith that he too could always accept her for what she was.

In a universe of miracles, that was the best one.

Then it was his turn.

They took him through an airlock into a small cold room. There was a white slab in it, more like an operating table than anything else. He took off his clothes and stretched out on it. His back tensed for the chill, but the table surface was warmed.

The doctor gave him his best bedside smile, checked his medical history a final time.

"See you in five years," the doctor said.

He used the needle, a big one. It stung, but not much.

Schaefer felt nothing at first, but when the medics lifted him onto a stretcher he found he had no sensation in his body. He tried to wiggle his fingers. Nothing happened.

The other lock opened.

The medics zipped up their suits and carried him through.

They were in the icebox. It must have been cold, for vapor clouds came out of the suits. His naked body did not feel it. He couldn't turn his head, but he saw enough. He saw more than he wanted to see.

Catacombs.

Glistening walls lined with cubicles. Forms in them, stiff and still. He could not see their faces, the faces were covered with masks and tubes.

They lifted him into his slot, and he felt nothing. He saw them insert two thin flexible tubes into his nostrils.

Then the mask.

He could not see.

This is the way death is. I cannot see or hear or smell. I cannot feel. There is no panic, no fear, no cold. There is nothing. I do not exist.

His mind began to blur. He could no longer think coherently, and then, from somewhere deep down inside of him,

he found a new respect for the admiral, and for all men who sailed this strangest of all strange seas. . . .

That was all.

He ceased to be.

At first, it was no worse than waking up after a long nap on a hot, sticky afternoon. He hovered between sleep and awareness and dreamed rapid and pointless dreams. A part of him knew that he had been asleep and that he would be awake soon.

It was all rather pleasant and drowsy.

It stayed that way for what seemed to be a long time.

Funny. So hard to wake up. Tired? Hangover? Sick?

Sick! No, worse than sick. What . . .

Ice. White. Cold.

Vaults, slabs, bodies.

I'm dead, it's over, don't let me wake up underground, in a box, with wet earth all around me, with my body—

He was out of it.

He opened his eyes. There was the doctor's face, smiling. He moved his head. He was on the white table under the white light. The table was warm under him, but the room was cold, and he was cold.

"Easy now, Dr. Schaefer," the doctor said. "It's always hard the first time, but you're perfectly all right."

He tried to move, couldn't.

His lips shaped a word. "Lee?" His voice was the voice of a stranger.

"Your wife is fine, just fine. She's waiting for you in your cabin. You'll be carried there on a stretcher. We'll have some hot broth waiting. A special diet for a day or two and you'll be your old self again."

My old self, but I know what death is now. I'll remember. I'll always remember.

Then he was in his cabin, in the bed, with Lee next to him. They could hardly talk, but the hot broth helped.

It was two days before he felt human again.

Then there were notes to go over with Sandy, notes and plans and charts.

When they were getting close, an officer appeared. "The admiral's compliments, sir. Aldebaran is visible in the control room viewer, if you would like to have a look at it."

They were escorted to the control room, a spotless oval chamber filled with computers. One entire wall was lined with dials, their surfaces red and green and yellow. A black bank of switches had four men on duty before it, seated in contour chairs, earphone bands across their heads.

Schaefer felt like an intruder, but he was fascinated.

Admiral Hurley stepped forward with a smile. "Have a good sleep?"

"I must have set the wrong dial," Sandoval said. "I think I overslept."

Hurley chuckled, very much at home here in his control room.

Schaefer thought, *On Earth, five years have passed. All my students will have gone, all my friends will be older.*

The admiral took Lee's arm and guided her to a panel as tall as she was. He nodded at a technician, and the slide rolled back.

They were looking out.

They saw beauty beyond belief, and loneliness that was almost painful to see.

A giant red sun blazed against a backdrop of night, with distant stars like diamonds around it. Streamers and fountains of brilliant gases erupted in flaring bursts. Scarlet prominences streaked the edges like the clouds of nightmare.

Distance was a word without a meaning. There was vastness everywhere, an endless depth that clutched at your stomach. Even that sun, seventy-two times the size of the sun Earth knew, was a brave candle burning in a cave of Stygian gloom.

"It's best not to look too long," Hurley said.

The panel closed.

They were back in the control room, back in familiar dimensions that a mind could grasp and understand.

"I thought you ought to see it," Hurley said.

"Thank you," Schaefer whispered. "It was worth the trip."

"We land in two days," the admiral said.

They were escorted back to their rooms.

There were few sensations in the hours that followed, but they could tell when the ship's power system switched over to antigravity. They waited the long wait.

In his mind's eye, Schaefer saw a planet, a blue world floating in space. He saw it grow larger, a balloon inflating. He saw continents and seas take form, and then trees and rivers and snow-kissed mountains.

He saw a strange, slim people, with long arms and eyes that watched and wondered—

A bell rang.

"We've landed," Sandoval said.

IV

A world is many worlds, and many peoples. A world is flame and ice, lush tropical jungles and brown desert sands, laughter and hate and boredom.

Their mission concerned just one part of one continent. They had no authority to visit the rest, no matter what fascinating things might be waiting there. But even one part of one continent was a large chunk of real estate; a man couldn't trot over it the way he could spring the length of a football field.

It was going to take time, and lots of it. Time to check on the inevitable changes that five years had brought. Time to find out the key facts the first expedition had not been authorized to investigate. Time to work out a solution to the problem faced by these people, and time to put that solution into effect.

Time, and more time.

The first contact ship had made some recordings of the local languages and dialects, and had mapped them. That was an enormous help, but it did not give conversational fluency, which was imperative.

There were no interpreters on Aldebaran IV.

And there could be no mistakes.

It would be pleasant, Schaefer thought, if it could have been done the flashy tri-di Space Patrol way. No pain, no trouble. You landed on Mudball VII, which looked just like Earth except that it had jagged mountains that it never could have had with an atmosphere. You stepped out in your razor-sharp uniform, mowed down a horde of slithering reptiles with your blaster, rescued a lovely but chaste female, and whipped up a jim-dandy whiz-bang invention on the spur of the moment. Then, as the enemy fled in consternation, you smiled your enigmatic smile and faded into stars and a word from your sponsor.

The actual plan was somewhat different.

The crew was to stay aboard the ship. Schaefer and Sandoval were to take copters and make extended studies of their special aspects of the problem. The UN men were to fan out with cameras and other recording devices and check for specific items of information.

It was going to take plenty of sweat, among other things. Lee, of course, had to stay in the ship, at least at first. The whole business was tricky, and it was senseless to multiply the risks they would have to take.

When the time came, Schaefer adjusted his oxygen mask and went through the airlock to the waiting copter. The heat hit him like a fist when he stepped outside. A glare of sunlight almost blinded him until he got used to it, and swirls of gritty brown dust pulled at his clothes.

He stood blinking for a moment, watching Sandoval as the ecologist grinned at the dust with anticipation. He felt his boots sink into the shifting stuff, but not far; it was solid as a rock slab underneath.

He thought: *This is the step of no return. This is the step*

into a new world, the step that Cortés and Pizarro and all the others took. This is the step that breaks the law, breaks the precedent. Who will follow in these footsteps, if word ever leaks out? Who will swarm on these people with honeyed words and grabbing hands?

"Come on, Mac," a man yelled. "This crate's blowing away."

Schaefer waved, swung up into the cabin. He settled himself and nodded at the man. The man let go, and Schaefer lifted the copter into the sky, up past the shining obelisk of the great ship.

He headed west, keeping low enough to spot details beneath him. From here, the land was a vast baked mud-flat, checkered with dark crack-lines. Dirty brown dust-eddies played over the surface, and the mighty red sun beat down on it all like a malevolent furnace.

At first, there was no sign of life.

Within twenty minutes, however, he passed over what had once been a town. Broken adobe walls were drifted high with sand, and the square ruins of houses had black gaping holes for windows. The place was utterly lifeless now, just as the once-alive land around it was dead.

Once, he knew, all this had been green farmland, with trees and streams and fields of grain.

Now, it was nothing.

He flew on, an excitement growing within him.

Death was everywhere, but ahead of him, beyond the horizon, the living village waited.

He came to the fields first, and they were nothing to write home about. They were irregular plots of burned-over land that had never known a plow, but there were crops growing in them, including something that looked a good deal like maize. The plants did not seem to be doing well, and it wasn't hard to figure out why: water.

There was an irrigation system of sorts, small trenches fed by what should have been a good-sized river. The river terraces were clearly visible from the air, and it was obvious

that the river was drying up. Schaefer doubted that it was a quarter of its former size, and the irrigation trenches weren't drawing that much water out of it by a long shot.

He saw people, too, poking pointed sticks. They looked up at him as he passed, and from his altitude they didn't look alien at all. He had the curious feeling that this was not another world, not a planet of another sun, but only the past of Earth; he felt that he had somehow gone back in time, to see his own ancestors fighting the hard fight with wind and sun and the long, long dry spells.

Then the village was below him.

It was a town, really, rather than a village. It was walled, just as the abandoned place had been, and it was basically a cluster of square adobe houses and dark crooked streets built around a central market plaza. Schaefer went down low, and he could see stout poles projecting from the sides of the houses over the streets. The slim, long-armed people were swinging through the hot air, hand over hand, from one pole to another. Apparently, they never walked if they could avoid it.

The town, even to his eyes, was not an attractive place.

It already had something of the decay of a ruin about it, but it was not clean as a ruin is clean, washed by patient rains and bleaching sunshine. There was garbage in the streets. *No wonder they travel on the walls above the streets. I'd do the same, if I could.* It was the sort of place that looked as if it were crawling with disease, and his skin prickled when he thought of it.

But then he saw the market below him as he hovered. It was a gay riot of color, and most of it was shaded by awnings. He looked down at what seemed to be a sea of faces, a million eyes all staring up at him.

He took a deep breath through his face mask.

"Ready or not, here I come," he muttered.

He hoped the information from the survey ship was correct. If not—

Well, he probably wouldn't live long enough to realize

that he'd made a mistake. There was no turning back now. He aimed his copter for a cleared space in the square, hovering until he was certain there was no one directly under him, and landed.

The copter blades shivered to a halt.

He climbed out, his empty hands in plain view.

In an instant, he was surrounded.

He stood there in the heat by his copter, and he was two people. One man faced the crowd with level eyes and a determined smile. The other stood back and watched, and felt a vague relief. Schaefer had never been a man of action, and he had often wondered how he would face up to a really dangerous situation.

He was unarmed, and he could have been quite literally torn apart if things went wrong. He was scared, deep down inside, but he could handle it.

It was a good thing to know about yourself.

He looked at them and they looked at him. They didn't press him too closely, and seemed more friendly than otherwise. He was the tallest man there, but hardly the most powerful. The people's arms were very long; their finger tips reached their ankles when they stood erect. The arms were slender and graceful, but they were strongly muscled.

He barely noticed the arms, however. It was the *feel* of the crowd that impressed him. They were a people of surprising dignity, even in a situation that was unfamiliar to them. Dignity—and courage too, he supposed, for they were probably as afraid of him as he was of them.

The people watched him with polite curiosity. They were very small-boned, and their tiny noses and wide dark eyes gave their faces an almost frail appearance. They were dressed in bright-colored tunics that left their arms completely free.

None of the men carried weapons. These were farmers and merchants, not soldiers. The rather elfin children were not at all shy, but they were well-behaved.

The girls, Schaefer had to admit, were a surprise. Despite their strangeness, they had an elusive grace and vitality,

with warm and gentle eyes. Their long supple arms and white canine teeth were just different enough to be really interesting. In fact, he decided, the girls were as genuinely sexy as any he had ever seen.

That could mean trouble, here as well as anywhere.

It had its compensations, however.

The people were very patient, most of them standing in the shade of awnings that covered the market tables and booths. They waited for him to make the first move. Schaefer, standing in the hot sun by his copter, was only too glad to oblige.

He raised his left hand, the four fingers extended, the thumb folded into his palm.

There was a murmur from the people, and they moved back respectfully. Schaefer wanted to talk to them, but he knew it wasn't a good idea for several reasons. For one thing, his command of the language was too shaky. For another, he didn't know these people well enough to be sure he was saying the proper thing, even if he managed the grammar adequately.

So he waited, and they waited.

He could not *see* the suffering as he studied them. Most of the people did not look thin, and they did not appear to be starving. It was not a dramatic moment where hordes of famine-ridden men and women gazed up at their rescuer with adoration in their eyes. They didn't know why he had come, and they didn't even need his help visibly.

He knew they were dying, nonetheless. A whole town had once lived on that sun-baked plain he had seen, and now lived no more. The people before him were undoubtedly fewer than they had been the year before, and would be fewer still next year. It was a subtle question of the carrying capacity of ruined land, and when the population pressure got too great for the food supply people died. It was all simple and timeless and horrible. He knew the facts in a way they could never know them—facts gathered by experts on the survey team. Within fifty years, this entire portion

of the continent would be dead—and there was no way out. These farmers were surrounded by tough hunting peoples that would never give up their territories.

So a few hundred thousand natives on a forbidden planet light-years from Earth were faced with extinction. No doubt it happened all the time, on worlds Earth did not know and never would know.

There were many men who could learn of such a tragedy and shrug. *So what? Did they ever do anything for us? We've nothing against those savages, but it's their problem, not ours.*

Schaefer looked at the people before him. He knew that he was not such a man, and he was glad of it.

There was a stir at the edges of the crowd, a buzz of voices.

Schaefer turned and made the sign again.

The priests were coming.

The religious officials wore long blue robes, although their arms were free. It was rather odd to see them come swinging along the wall-poles, hand over hand, their skirts swirling in the air. They did it with a solemn gravity that should have been ludicrous, but wasn't.

Once in the market square, they walked straight up to Schaefer and confronted him in a group. Schaefer made the sign, and it was returned.

The priest who seemed to be the leader said something that was too fast for Schaefer. Schaefer smiled carefully and said one of the sentences he had learned: "I come as your friend, and I wish to be taken to your temple."

The priest nodded impassively. He was a striking figure of a man, and the white-striped fur on his head gave him a certain man-of-distinction air. He was obviously no fool; when he saw that Schaefer did not handle the language well, he made no further attempt to speak. Again, Schaefer was amazed at the courtesy of these people. He was positive

that the priest would do almost anything to avoid causing his guest embarrassment.

Beckoning to him, the priest turned and led the way out of the market. Schaefer fell in behind him without hesitation, knowing that his copter was safe where it was. The other priests kept him pretty well surrounded, but it was more of an escort than a guard.

He had a bad moment when the leader started to swing up to the wall projections above the street, but the priest looked at Schaefer's arms and changed his mind. He stuck to the ground, which was quite a concession considering the debris that littered the space between the adobe house walls.

Schaefer knew that they were wondering about him—a man who, by their standards, was an absolute freak. A man who had come out of the sky. A man who knew their sacred sign and a few words of their dialect. A man who resembled those beings seen several seasons ago, about whom so many stories had been whispered. . . .

Well, the important thing was to make contact with the men at the top. Schaefer was too well-trained to start with the common people, whether he liked them or not. Once you got fouled up with factions, once you were an object of suspicion to the big boys, you never got anywhere in an alien culture. The fact was that humanoid beings, despite their individual differences, always followed certain laws. One such principle was that in an agricultural town of this type the secular and religious authorities were apt to be the same; in other words, it was likely to be a theocracy. This being the case, a man either got along with the priests or he got out.

They led him into a house that was little different from the others they had passed, but inside there was a deep stairway lighted by smooth-burning torches. The temple, of course, was underground. Had this not been the case, he would certainly have spotted a pyramid-like structure from the air.

He followed the priests into a long, winding passage. The

light was bad, and there was little to see. Eventually they came into a large chamber in which hundreds of oil-burning lamps were flaring. The walls were hung with tapestries. In a depression at one end of the chamber there was a black altar. Spaced around the walls, rather like pictures placed over cloth, were little rings of black skins. Each skin was only a few inches across, but there were lots of them.

Schaefer was glad to see them. They meant that Sandy was right.

There was no ceremony. That was for show, for the people. It would come later, if it was needed. For the present, the priests wanted information, and they went about it in a no-nonsense manner.

Schaefer was escorted into the presence of a man who apparently was the priest-king, although there was no exact translation of his title in English. He sat on a couch in a small, austere room. He was a small man, even for his people, but he absolutely dominated the situation with the force of his personality. He fixed his dark alert eyes on Schaefer's face and Schaefer was startled by the familiarity of those eyes.

They were Moravia's eyes.

They were haunted eyes.

There was a whispered conversation between the priest-king and the man who had led Schaefer's escort. Then Schaefer was left alone with the ruler of the people.

There was a long silence.

Schaefer had an uneasy feeling that he was in the presence of a powerful man, who commanded strange gods. But when the man spoke his voice was calm and courteous.

"I am Marin," he said slowly. "I wait for your words."

Schaefer swallowed and made the speech he had learned. "I am called Schaefer. I have come to help you if you desire help. I come in friendship and without weapons. It is known that your lands shrink, your crops fail, your people die. Your tongue is new to me, and I must learn more of it.

Then we will talk. It is my prayer that there will always be friendship between your people and my people."

Marin fixed his eyes again on Schaefer's face, and Schaefer was glad that he had been speaking the simple truth, neither more nor less. Marin was not a man to be trifled with.

Marin got to his feet, placed his left hand on Schaefer's right shoulder. His face was shadowed in the lamplight. His grip was strong. "Let it be so, Schaefer. Your prayer is good. Soon we will talk again. Until then, live in peace among us."

Marin himself led him out and introduced him to an old priest named Loquav, who was to be his teacher.

After that, Schaefer settled down for months of hard work.

He had a lot to learn before he spoke with Marin again.

A worry he could not identify nagged him as he worked. He sensed an urgency that drove him far into the night, studying by a flickering torch.

He saw eyes when he slept.

Moravia's.

Marin's.

Hurley's.

"It is my prayer that there will always be friendship between your people and my people."

What could go wrong?

He thought of Lee, missing her. And he wondered how Sandy was coming along. . . .

High in the mountains, where the eagle-winds cry out their icy power against the rocks, the snow was falling in a blanket of white. It was too high for trees to grow, and there was little shelter on the wild outcropping where Tino Sandoval stood.

He was alone, his boots knee-deep in crusted snow, his eyes narrowed against the cutting wind. His breath, filtered through his mask that concentrated the natural oxygen in the air, was a cloud of freezing vapor that blew away even as it formed.

Far below him, miles away, he could see the flat plains baking in an autumn sun. The cold had not yet come to the lowlands, and still he stood with his legs half-buried in the middle of winter.

"Sunlight and plants and animals and water," he said to himself, speaking in a whisper that would have been audible had there been anyone to hear. Sandoval had often talked to himself at Spring Lake; indeed, he had written that no man was ever lonely when he could talk to himself with understanding. "It is always the same, wherever man lives, in whatever time."

Sunlight. All life came from the sun. Without the energy of a sun, there could be no life. Many peoples, including some of his own ancestors, had bowed down before the sun, and perhaps they had worshiped more wisely than they knew.

Plants. If the sunlight falls on bare soil, there is heat, which is lost when the cool night comes. But with grass or leaves it is a different story. The chlorophyll takes the sun's energy and builds with it, blending air and water and soil to make new leaves and new grasses. The energy is not given up with the night, but is stored. It waits patiently in green forests and waving fields of grass, and then the animals come. . . .

Animals. They eat the grass and plants and leaves, storing and concentrating the energy in their bodies. And then the grass-eaters are devoured in turn by the meat-eaters, and these may also be eaten, or may die and release their energy again to the living plants. Life is a vast pyramid. Each layer feeds on the layer beneath it, and all live on the sun that is the pyramid's base. Man stands alone atop the pyramid, and in his pride he imagines that he is independent. It is only when he is thirsty or when his land blows away that he remembers the rain, the magic of water. . . .

Water. Sandoval nudged the snow with his boot. Water had given birth to life, and life could not survive without it. On Earth, it had taken five thousand pounds of water

to produce a single pound of wheat. The water began here, falling from the clouds as the snow that covered the ground and melted against his face. The snow would lie on the ground all winter, waiting. Farther down the mountain, where the trees grew, banks of snow should accumulate in the shade. It would melt only slowly, and the insulating blanket of conifer needles would prevent the freezing of the soil underneath. The water would sink gradually into the sponge-like humus, and filter down and down, until the mountain became a reservoir of stored water, until great underground rivers flowed and seeped into the soil, giving life. When it reached the plains, the dry vegetation would suck it up, and some of the water would bubble up to the surface in clear springs, and creeks and brooks would feed the rivers that ran forever to the sea.

That was under normal conditions, of course.

Conditions here were not normal.

That was the trouble.

The land had been touched by fire and flood and famine. The forests were gone, the grasslands dead. When the water came, it splattered out into the sun-baked plains that could not absorb it. The water gushed through straight gullies and into rivers, carrying what was left of the topsoil with it. The silt-filled rivers rushed the brown flood away to the sea, and it was useless.

Sandoval shook his head, turned, and began to trudge down toward his copter. The wind cut at his face and his feet were cold in his boots. It was so easy to bring death to the land. . . .

He passed through a fire-blackened forest, its branches naked against the winter wind. He knew the forest well, every tree of it. He and his men had worked hard these many months, and Sandoval had been happy. This was work he believed in, and work he loved.

He had killed a million beetles in that dead bark, planted a million trees in that barren soil, calculated innumerable bacteria counts for the forest that would come again.

And woodpeckers! They looked very much like the woodpeckers of Earth, although they were of different species. After all, he reflected, a woodpecker is such a specialized bird that it has to follow a certain design: a long sturdy bill to drill under the bark with, feet to grip the bark while it works, tail feathers with supporting tips to hold it steady. They had hatched enough woodpeckers to stuff a spaceship, and they had not forgotten the nuthatches who would finish the job by getting the insects in the bark crevices.

World-savers?

Yes, they existed.

Not men.

Woodpeckers.

He reached the sheltered valley where his copter waited. He climbed into it with reluctance, despite the cold outside. Sandoval was a man of the land, content to leave the sky for others. He took off and flew down the valley and out into the warm air over the plains.

He smiled a little, looking down at the rolling country. He knew the plains, too. They had broken its baked surface, plowed it with heavy remote equipment from the ship, poked holes in it to hold the water when it came. They had dug huge contour furrows to hold back the flooding of the rivers. They had caught and were breeding grazing animals to eat the grass that was as yet invisible. And tiny gophers and ground squirrels and rats to paw and tug at the soil, keeping it loose for other rains. And predators to control the grass-eaters. . . .

It wasn't easy to give life back to a dead land.

But Sandoval knew satisfaction. This land would come back, even as it had on a ruined Earth. One day it would be green again, deep with cool grasses, and the towns would return. . . .

The ship glinted before him, silver in the afternoon sun. The sight brought mixed feelings to Tino Sandoval. For just a moment, his vision clouded, and the ship became another

ship, a wooden ship on a sea of blue, its sails puffed with the wind. Sandoval was an Indian, and he remembered.

The face of Admiral Hurley was too much like the faces that stared proudly from the pages of history books. The hand that he had shaken was too much like the hand that had been red with Mexico's blood.

(He had washed his hands thoroughly after he had shaken hands with the admiral. He had called himself a superstitious fool, but he had rubbed his hands on the towel until they hurt.)

And Evan Schaefer. A quiet man, a man easy to underestimate. Sandoval had known men like him before, men who could not be pushed, men who stood by your side when the chips were down. Men like Schaefer were rare in any age. He liked Evan Schaefer and his wife, but he knew he would never tell them so. He had found some late wild-flowers in the valley, and he would put them in Lee's cabin.

She would know who had given them to her, being the kind of woman she was. Sandoval had known many women, but never one like Lee. She made him sad for all the years that might have been.

He landed the copter by the ship.

He had not seen Schaefer for many months. He hoped Schaefer was doing all right. . . .

Almost a year had passed since he had first glimpsed the town of the people, which they called Home-of-the-World, and Evan Schaefer knew now what he had to do.

The old priest Loquav, with his near-sighted eyes and silver fur, had taught him many things besides the language of the people. He had taught him a religion that on one level was an erotic cast of harvest-goddesses and rain-gods, and on another level was a moving symbol of man's ties to the land on which he lived, the air he breathed, and the sun that warmed him. He had taken him out into the streets of Home-of-the-World, and into the poor houses. There he had seen the suffering and privation he had not seen in the

market square: the tired women, the empty-eyed men, the silent and hungry children. He had spoken to him of other times, when the people had been as the grass of the fields, and the granaries had been choked with food.

And old Loquav had done more than that. He had made Schaefer feel at home with the people. He had given him the warmth of friendship in a hard winter. He had looked at a being who was monstrous by his standards, and seen only the man who lived in that body. It was a trick that men of Earth often could not learn.

Loquav had said to him, "I know not if you are man or god or devil, but while we are together you are my brother."

Schaefer had seen Marin twice, and they had talked, but it was a touchy business.

One night, when the red sun had just dipped below the far horizon and the long shadows were painting the adobe roofs with flat black fingers, Schaefer stepped out into the streets alone. He walked toward the market square, where he heard the night-music striking up for dancing.

That was when he saw it.

There, in the shadows.

A man who was too big to be of the people, and a thick voice muttering in English, "*Come on, baby, wrap those fine long arms around me, I've been away a long, long time. . . .*"

A native girl, curious and afraid, not wishing to offend, standing with her back against an adobe house wall.

Schaefer felt a sickness in his stomach. He hurried on to the market square, where fires were burning brightly and drums were throbbing like heartbeats. He saw more of them, men from the ship, dancing with the girls.

And he saw men of the people, standing in the shadows, watching in silence.

Schaefer did not hesitate. He ran to his copter, climbed into the cabin, and took off into the twilight. There was a black fury raging inside him, and he pushed the copter as fast as it would go, toward the ship and Admiral Hurley.

V

Coming down past the great tower of the ship, he felt like a bug crawling down a flagpole. The copter hit with a puff of dust and Schaefer was out and running almost before it was secured.

He went through the airlock, jerked his oxygen mask off gratefully, and walked straight to Hurley's quarters, his heavy boots leaving a trail of dust behind him on the polished floors. He had been back to the ship twice to see Lee, but Hurley came first this trip.

There was an officer outside Hurley's door.

"Just a moment, sir," the man said. "I have strict instructions—"

"Get out of my way, please."

"Sir, the admiral said—"

"This is important. Just say in your report that I overpowered you." Schaefer brushed past the man, while the officer muttered under his breath about civilians in general and Schaefer in particular.

Schaefer knocked on the door, hard.

It opened after a moment.

Schaefer swallowed the remark he had ready. It was Mrs. Hurley who stood before him, a gray-haired, motherly type, with a gentle face made to order for beaming over blueberry pie.

"Yes? Carl is taking a nap right now. . . ."

"I'm very sorry to disturb you, but I must see him. Now."

"Well, I don't know. I do hope there hasn't been any trouble? You must be that anthropologist person Carl told me about."

"Yes, Mrs. Hurley. I'm that anthropologist person, fangs and all. Now, if you'll just—"

"I'll handle this, Martha." Admiral Hurley stepped before her, fully dressed but with signs of sleep still in his eyes.

"I'll see you in my office, Schaefer. You know better than to come here."

"I'll be waiting," Schaefer said. He nodded politely to Mrs. Hurley. "A pleasure, ma'am."

He walked up to Hurley's office, seated himself, and waited.

The admiral let him stew for ten minutes and then came in and sat down behind his desk. His balding head gleamed in the light. His lean, sharp-featured face was expressionless, but his green eyes were cold as ice.

"Well, Mr. Schaefer?"

Schaefer forced himself to be calm. He fished out his pipe and tobacco that he had picked up in his copter and puffed on it until he could taste the fragrant smoke. The admiral had kept him waiting and he was determined to repay the compliment. He blew a lazy smoke ring at the ceiling.

"Well, Mr. Schaefer? I'm not accustomed to—"

"Neither am I," Schaefer snapped.

The admiral shrugged. "No personalities, please. I assume you have something you want to say to me?"

Schaefer leaned forward, his pipe clamped in his teeth. "You know why I'm here, Hurley."

"I'm afraid I haven't the faintest idea."

"Your men are in the town."

Hurley waved his hand impatiently. "Oh, that. Yes, of course. They have my permission."

Schaefer stood up. "You've got to get them back here."

"I give the orders to my men, Mr. Schaefer. Please remember where you are."

"Dammit, man, this is important! You don't know those people over there. They are very proud. This could ruin everything. If they don't get out, there'll be trouble."

Hurley smiled. "You don't know my men, Mr. Schaefer. Men are men. They always know when there are women within ten light-years."

"You don't understand, Admiral. If they're that eager, stick 'em in the icebox until we get through here."

Hurley shook his head. "Can't do that. Regulations specify that a ship landed on alien soil must maintain its crew in constant readiness."

Schaefer felt a chill of despair. Talking to Hurley was like ramming your head against a block of cement. "The people won't stand for it, Hurley."

"I'll be the judge of that."

"Listen, Hurley—"

"No, *you* listen, Mr. Schaefer." The admiral paused, holding himself under control. "I am in command of this ship. I'll give the orders that pertain to the morale and welfare of my men. It is not my will that has kept us on this planet for almost a year. It is not my responsibility that your party took up space that might have been used for other men's wives. You evidently thought it necessary to bring *your* wife along, and I do not condemn you for it. We will leave this planet whenever you inform me that our mission has been accomplished. Until that time, I have a crew of men to handle. We are doing a lot for those savages, Mr. Schaefer, and it's costing a lot of money. They can spare a few native women. I know the type; they're all the same."

"You've never even been over to look at them. Is that all they are to you—savages?"

Hurley shrugged.

"Answer me!"

"You are the ones who make the definitions, Mr. Schaefer. The rest of us have work to do. No one is forcing the natives to do anything. If they are overflowing with virtue, they will conduct themselves accordingly."

"With a gang of sex-hungry crewmen? You know better than that, Hurley."

The admiral got to his feet. "Was there anything else you wished to see me about?"

Schaefer was suddenly conscious that his fists were clenched at his sides, clenched so tightly that his fingers ached. *Oh, to take just one swing at that damned supercilious jaw!*

He forced himself to calm down.

"There's going to be trouble. You've been warned, Hurley, and I'll hold you personally responsible for whatever happens."

"Thank you for your warning," the admiral said evenly. "I'll take it under advisement."

"Thanks a lot."

Schaefer turned and left.

The thing had started now, and there would be no stopping it.

Hurry, hurry!

He found Lee in their cabin. She was pale and thinner than before, but she was OK. He knew she would always be OK, and that he never had to worry about her again. He stayed with her for two hours, and told her what had happened.

Then he got back in his copter and flew off to find Sandy.

Hurry, hurry!

It was three days before he could return to Home-of-the-World.

Deep beneath the walled town, in the dark temple of the people, Marin the priest-king stood straight and still, his dark eyes burning like the lamps that ringed the chamber walls. His long arms were hidden beneath the folds of his robe and his canine teeth flashed in the light when he spoke.

"You told me long ago that you came as a friend to help my people, Schaefer. I took your words for truth, for no man lies to his friend. My people have taken you in, fed you through a hard winter when the sun was pale, taught you our tongue. Now men of your own kind descend on the people like a plague. They take our women in the shadows and mock our Home-of-the-World. This must not be, this cannot be. Speak, Schaefer, for you have many things to explain."

Schaefer felt the weight of a city on his back, doubly heavy because Home-of-the-World was his home now, just

as the men of the ship were men who might have been his brothers. A man caught in the middle was seldom lucky, he thought, despite the old joke. "All my words to you have been true words, Marin. In your heart you know this. There are many men in my tribe and I cannot control them all. You must endure those of my kind who make a mockery of your people and your traditions. You must tolerate them. There is no other way."

"And why must I do these things?"

"If there is trouble, my friend, I cannot help you. You must believe me when I say that my people are very powerful. It is better to let them alone."

The priest-king shook his head. "They do not let us alone," he pointed out, "and you have not helped me yet, Schaefer."

Schaefer took a deep breath. It was now or never. Marin would not be put off much longer with promises, not with strange men walking the streets of Home-of-the-World.

"Will you come with me, Marin? Will you let me take you into the sky in my machine? Will you let me *show* you how we have helped you, if you can no longer accept my word?"

The priest-king hesitated and seemed to withdraw into the shadows of the vault. "This would not be a good time to leave my people."

"Marin is not afraid?"

The priest-king drew himself up proudly.

"I will go with you," he said. "When do we leave?"

"Right now."

"Let it be so."

Side by side, the two men walked out of Marin's chamber, into the large cavern with its hundreds of lamps burning, its black altar waiting in the alcove, its little rings of dark woodpecker-scalps hanging on the walls. Then up through the long winding corridor, and out into the dazzling sunlight.

The copter was waiting for them under the open sky.

Spring had come again to the land of the people, a

powder of green sprinkled across the plains, a scattering of tiny spots of red and blue and yellow that were flowers in the sun. It was not a spring as Marin had seen it in his youth, when he had run barefoot with the other boys through dew-wet grasses and swung with them on the strong forest branches that laced the roof of the world, but it was a better spring than he had seen these later years, and a spring he had feared he might never see again.

It marked a turning point. That was the important thing.

Marin stared down at the rolling plains, cool with the fresh delicate green of new grass. His quick dark eyes caught the sparkle of fresh water in the streams, not the yellow-brown floods of mud that roared to the river, but living water to give the world a drink.

The copter had not impressed him much; it was alien magic.

The miracle he saw below him did impress him. This was a magic worth knowing.

"The land is coming back," he said simply.

"Yes. Next year it will be better still."

"How have you done this thing, Schaefer?"

"That's what I'm going to try to show you. It will not be easy for you."

"My people will do anything. When the land dies, the people follow. I have looked long at our children, and wondered."

Schaefer landed in a valley where a young forest had been planted. Even with their artificial growth techniques, the trees were little more than shrubs. But they were growing.

He led Marin up a winding trail to where green shoots were searching for life in the ruins of a fire-blackened growth of dead conifers. New flowers covered the forest floor and there was a hum of insects in the air.

There was another sound, too, cutting through the silence like a million hammers.

Woodpeckers.

Schaefer ripped away a chunk of dead black bark. A

horde of beetles scabbled for cover in the riddled wood underneath. A brave woodpecker buzzed past his face, eager to get at the bugs before they vanished under the bark.

Schaefer found a stump and sat down. Marin stood watching the woodpecker a moment, then he sat down beside Schaefer.

"You talk," he said. "I will listen."

Schaefer groped for eloquence in a foreign tongue. He told Marin as best he could what had happened to the ghost of a forest they saw around them. It had been a combination of many things, but he simplified the story to get his point across. It only took a little thing to kill the land, a tiny thing, an insignificant thing.

Like a woodpecker.

The people hunted woodpeckers, because they valued their black scalps as a wealth symbol. Every house had some woodpecker scalps; without them, a man was a pauper. The temple had thousands of them hanging in circles on the walls. Under ordinary circumstances, this wouldn't have mattered. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred nothing would happen.

But it had happened this time.

Nature was a living fabric, a neatly balanced system in which every organism had a job to do. The woodpecker's job was to drill into the bark of trees to get the beetles that lived there. Not all of them, of course. Just enough to keep the beetle population down to where the living tree could handle it.

Take some woodpeckers away. Take them away in a bad year, when the remaining woodpeckers fail to rebuild the forest woodpecker families. A tree falls in a windstorm, and then another. Their roots are broken, their sap runs weakly. The remaining woodpeckers cannot reach the beetles that attack the tree where it lies on the ground.

The beetles breed and thrive and multiply.

Other trees become riddled with the bugs, and they die

and fall. They lie on the ground, and they dry out. Dead dry wood, waiting—

A storm. Dark clouds massed in a turbulent sky. A flash of lightning, a crash of thunder. Another stab of lightning, another—

The dry wood is ignited.

The forest is in flames. The winds blow, and carry the flames to other trees. An entire watershed is destroyed, and this happens in many places.

The snow falls in the winter, piling up in drifts. With the spring sun it melts, and there is nothing to hold it. It rushes down the mountains in torrents, across the plains in a flood, into the rivers that rage toward the sea in a yellow-brown torrent of land-destroying fury—

The land dies. The grasses and animals disappear. There is no life-giving water in the soil. The winds blow, and the dust swirls in ugly clouds through the deserted towns where the people once lived and laughed and hoped. . . .

There was a long silence, broken only by the hum of insects and the *rat-tat-tat* of the woodpeckers.

"It is hard to believe," Marin said finally. "All that from a few woodpeckers."

"There were other things. The woodpecker, as it happens, was critical here."

"But the woodpecker scalp is wealth to us." Marin spread his hands, his long arms outstretched. "You know how men are."

You know how men are.

I know, I know.

"I will show you greater wealth," Schaefer said slowly.

He led the way back through the dawning life to the copter. He reached into the cabin and pulled out a sack.

"Hold out your hands, Marin."

He poured a pile of glittering gold coins into the waiting hands.

"I will teach you to make these. And there are other things you must learn about the land you live on."

They got into the copter, and it lifted into the air. They flew back over the plains that were living again, pale green in the spring sun.

And all the way back the sunlight glinted on the shiny gold coins that the priest-king ran through his fingers over and over again.

Another year rushed by in Home-of-the-World. For Schaefer, it was a year of hard work and worry. He pulled a lot of cultural strings, getting across the idea that his gold coins were pleasing to the gods, while the woodpecker scalps were not. He showed the people where to find the gold in the streams, and what to do with it when they had it. He had some of the UN men demonstrate what could be done with a plot of land if the people would adopt a few improved farming techniques. There was a great deal of disease in the town, but he knew better than to introduce modern medicines which would only result in a population explosion that would negate everything else that had been done.

He worried as hard as he worked. Perhaps he was a natural worrier; Lee had always told him that he was. But it was an explosive situation, and it was only a matter of time before the fuse caught fire. His only hope was to finish his work and get out before disaster struck.

Fortunately, there were no pregnancies among the girls of the town who were running around with the crewmen of the ship. The men had sense enough to take their pills, and that helped.

Unfortunately, it took time for grass to grow, time for forest to come back, time for the water to seep down into the reservoirs of the mountains.

Sandy and his men nursed the trees along, and readied the different animals for the grasslands and the forests.

And, miraculously, the thing that Schaefer feared did not come for many long months.

But it finally came.

It came with shattering abruptness.

Two men from the ship, drunk on native beer, attacked a respected girl, daughter of a nobleman. The girl crawled home through the garbage in the streets, and she died horribly.

The young men of Home-of-the-World did not wait for Marin to tell them what to do. They had seen their women taken from them for too long and they had swallowed their pride until it stuck in their throats.

Their rage was a flame swinging along the walls of the town.

Hundreds of them shouted together and became a mob, an avalanche of vengeance. They caught four innocent crewmen in their streets and they killed them very slowly, pulling the bodies apart with their immensely strong arms.

Then they took the pieces and threw them into a dark shop where other men from Earth were drinking.

Riot thundered in the walled adobe town, and out into the fields beyond. Within two hours the streets were deserted, the square windows black. There was silence in Home-of-the-World, the silence of the death that had been and the death that was yet to be.

All but one of the living crewmen ran from the town and rode their copters back to the ship. But the people caught one of them, and kept him alive. A hundred men bound his arms and dragged him out into the fields. Torches were lighted and songs were chanted, and the whole mob set out across the plains toward the ship, waving their spears and bows and clubs.

Schaefer was hidden in a tiny room beneath the temple. He did not dare show his face in the streets, for his face was white and that was enough for the men of the people.

"We've got to stop them," he whispered. "We've got to stop them before they reach the ship. They'll be wiped out, every last one of them."

Old Loquav, his short-sighted eyes blinking in the dim light of the lamp, shook his silver-furred head sadly. "It is

said among my people that death can race between two tribes faster than the wind."

"Could you stop them, if you could reach them in time?"

The old priest shrugged. "Marin has already left Home-of-the-World to advise his people. But words spoken in a storm are torn from the mouth and are not heard."

"He won't make it, Loquav. Is my copter safe?"

"The machine has not been harmed."

"Could we get to it?"

"There is a way."

The gloom pressed in upon them with the weight of centuries.

"Come on! We've got to do what we can."

Loquav shook his head. "I must do what must be done," he said, looking at Schaefer. "You, my friend, must rejoin your people. That is the way of the world."

There was no time for argument.

The old priest led the way, and the two men hurried along a dark twisting tunnel toward the stars.

The copter overtook the mob when it was a little over a mile from the ship. From the air, the people were a blaze of orange torches in the night, a nightmare of phantom shadows against the starlit silver of the plains.

"Put me down between my people and your people," Loquav said. "Be careful that you do not get trapped within range of the arrows, for an arrow asks not a man's motive."

Schaefer could not see the captive crewman, but he knew he was there. He toyed with the notion of trying to land the copter in the midst of the torches in an attempt to snatch the man to freedom, but he knew that the plan would not work.

He flew on, then skidded the copter to a halt on the level plains a few hundred yards from the marching men. He could hear the drums now, and the chants that filled the night with sound. There was grass under the copter where

there had been dust two years ago, but that counted for nothing now.

Loquav touched his shoulder. "Goodby, my friend," he said. "I will remember you with kindness in my heart."

The old priest climbed down from the cabin, turned his near-sighted eyes toward the torch-flames, and began to walk steadily to meet his people.

Schaefer skimmed the copter over the grass until he reached the ship. He left it with the other copters, and the airlock opened to take him in.

"Glad you made it, Schaefer," an officer said. "We were worried about you."

Schaefer tore off his mask. "Where's Hurley?"

"Control room. They've got the negatives on the scope. Bill Bergman is still alive, but he looks bad."

"Bergman the one they caught?"

"That's right. He's a good kid, Dr. Schaefer."

"They're all good kids."

He ran through a ship tense with excitement and hurried into the control room. It was fully staffed and ready for action. Admiral Hurley stared at a viewscreen, his face taut with worry.

"Schaefer?"

"Yes."

"I want you to look at this."

Schaefer looked. The people were clear in the screen; he could see their thin faces, their long arms, their eyes burning in the torchlight. He saw Bill Bergman too—hardly more than a boy, with close-cropped hair and wide, terrified eyes. Four of the people were carrying Bergman, one for every arm and leg.

They were going to tear him apart.

He saw old Loquav, his back to the ship, waving his arms and talking to them. The people pushed him out of the way and came on.

The admiral's voice was surprisingly hushed when he spoke. It was the voice of an honest man who faced his mis-

take squarely. "I was wrong, Dr. Schaefer. That will not bring those boys back."

"No, it won't. It's too late now."

He stared at the people. A maddened mob of savages—yes, if you looked at it that way. But they were men as well, men who had taken all they could take, men who had been pushed too far. They were remembering their wives and daughters, and the men who had come among them in friendship.

"Our fire is accurate," Hurley said. "We can pick them off without touching Bergman."

Schaefer nodded, his stomach a sick knot inside him. A simple choice. A hundred men who would never have a chance for a boy who had meant no harm.

The torches came closer. The people stopped.

They held Bergman's body up, ready to pull it to pieces.

Hurley turned to Schaefer with a stricken face.

"You decide," he whispered.

The four men began to pull, slowly.

Schaefer closed his eyes. "Don't hit the priest," he said.

"He was only trying to stop them."

The admiral straightened up.

"Fire!" he ordered.

VI

There on that shadowed nightland, beneath the radiance of the stars, the men of the people fell like wheat severed by the scythe. They fell one by one, the shock of amazement on their faces, when they still had faces. They fell and they writhed briefly in the cool green of the grass, and then they moved no more.

It was over in seconds.

Perhaps it was an accident, perhaps not. Schaefer never knew. But old Loquav fell with the rest, his close-sighted eyes at last giving up the struggle to see.

Only—the boy named Bill Bergman remained on his feet, while the torch-flames flared and sputtered around him like the fires of hell. He covered his face with his hands and stumbled toward the ship.

"Go out and bring him in," Hurley ordered. There was no triumph in his voice.

"I'm going too," Schaefer said.

The admiral nodded. "Yes. Maybe we ought to see it up close. Maybe we owe them that, at least."

They left the ship and walked through the starlight across the grass they had planted. They walked up to the pile of bodies and there was nothing to say.

Schaefer found the old priest, and cradled Loquav's silver head in his arms. He could not even cry.

"Shall we bury them?" Hurley asked finally.

"No. No, I don't think so. We can't give them a burial that would have any meaning for them. These are not our dead. Their people will come for them."

"What can we do?"

"We can get the blazes out of here before there's any more killing. It's all over, Carl. I can never go back to the town again, even if Marin himself would be willing—he couldn't control the others after what's happened here tonight."

Hurley seemed to be searching for some words that didn't exist. He finally said, "Were you nearly finished?"

"It all depends. I think Sandy has his end pretty well taken care of. I thought I had Marin ready to do what was necessary—now I don't know."

"I wish there was something I could do."

You've done enough, pal, Schaefer thought, then choked off the feeling. Hurley at least knew when he had made a mistake, which was more than could be said for most men. "You can get this ship away right now, tonight, as fast as you can. That's all there is left to us."

Schaefer looked across the starlit plains toward the town

the people called Home-of-the-World. He knew those rolling plains were far from empty. Out there in the long silence of the night, Marin was standing, watching him, wondering.

Don't let it all have been for nothing, old friend, Schaefer prayed. Try to remember the good with the rest. Try not to think too badly of me when you grieve for your dead. Keep your land always, priest-king, and use it well.

He touched Loquav's wet shoulder in a last goodbye. The flames of the torches hissed in the grass, burning themselves out. The other dead, the nameless ones, were stacked like cordwood in the shadows.

Schaefer remembered words from long ago. *"It is my prayer that there will always be friendship between your people and my people."*

Had there been other men, in other times, who had voiced that prayer in vain?

He turned and followed the living back toward the ship. The stars were bright above him, and they had never seemed so far away.

The men from Earth could not leave that night.

It was late the next afternoon before Sandy agreed to come in from his forest, where he had been adjusting the wildlife balance in the ecological system he had set up. When he got out of his copter he walked over to the terrible dark pile under the hot red sun and looked at it in tight-lipped silence.

He said nothing to Hurley when he entered the ship, and his only question to Schaefer was about Benito Moravia. After that he was silent and withdrawn, as though seeking to disassociate himself from the men around him.

The great ship lifted on the soundless power of her anti-gravs, a silver giant drifting up the ladder of the sky. She rose into flame-edged clouds, and beyond them through the peaceful blue of the atmosphere.

She entered the bright silence of space, and her atomics

splashed white flame into the sea that washed the shores of forever.

She was going home.

Where the ship had been, there was a hushed quiet. It was a hot and windless day, and the grass hardly moved under the glare of the red sun. Miles away, toward the mountains, a herd of animals snorted nervously, and lifted their heads from the clean streams that chuckled down from the hills where new forests grew.

And the dead were very still.

The people came with the evening shadows. Brothers and wives and sweethearts and fathers and mothers, they picked through the bodies, searching for faces they had known. And then they carried their dead back through the merciful darkness to Home-of-the-World.

Marin the priest-king went directly to his temple, where torches flamed around the walls and he could not hear the mourning songs of his people. He knelt before the dark altar and closed his eyes.

He saw old Loquav, who had padded through these corridors when Marin was yet a boy. He saw all his people, who had trusted him, and now were gone.

He saw other things as well.

He saw sweet grass where there had been no grass. He saw streams with clear water, where you could count the pebbles on the bottom and drink until your eyes ached. He saw trees and flowers where there had been only naked fire-blackened ghosts.

He saw children of his people, no longer hungry and frightened, and he saw their children beyond them, fading into the gray mists of all the years that were to come.

Marin the priest-king prayed a very hard prayer. He prayed for the safety of the ship that had come from the skies, and now was going back to a land he would never see.

Then he opened his eyes and prayed a much easier prayer.

He prayed that the ship would never again come to the people who lived in Home-of-the-World.

The ship sailed a starbright sea, and the years whispered by like wind-blown sands where winds and sands could never be.

Schaefer lay frozen in his slot, with tubes in his nostrils and a mask covering his sightless eyes. He felt nothing now, and there are no dreams in death.

But before the nothingness had come, when the doctor had taken his body from the warm slab and the medics had carried him through the lock and into the glistening catacombs where he would spend the voyage to Earth in not-life, he had seen faces before his freezing eyes.

Lee's, framed by soft brown hair, warming him even as the blood slowed in his veins.

Sandy's, lost in self-accusation that reached far back into the past, back into a time when his own people had been visited by ships that had sailed strange seas.

Hurley's, lean and composed now beneath his balding head, hiding the failure that crawled through his chest.

Loquav.

Marin.

And, most of all, the haunted face and tortured eyes of Benito Moravia.

Moravia, waiting and wondering and fearing, as the long years crept by . . .

The ship touched down on Earth twelve years and two months from the day of its departure. It landed at night, in secrecy. No bands played, no one greeted them.

Its arrival was never publicly announced.

Moravia, of course, was informed that it had landed.

Schaefer and his wife hurried home, knowing that he would be waiting for them there.

Their house floated at five thousand feet, a cool green island in the gold of the sun. Time had passed it by, and it was unchanged, waiting for them.

This was like a thousand other homecomings they had known. They had gone out, perhaps to eat at Rocky Falls, as they had done so often now that they were alone. They were coming back, on an ordinary afternoon in a familiar world, with only a threat of rain blowing in from the west to hint at anything unusual.

But there was already a copter in the garage.

They landed and went inside. Schaefer held his wife's arm; Lee was very tired, although she was trying not to show it. Their home was soothing around them, its redwood walls warm and welcoming.

An old man rose from his chair as they entered. A cigarette trembled slightly in his blue-veined hand. The hair that had been black was a faded gray. The haunted brown eyes were tired, and the lines in the face had deepened.

For Benito Moravia, it had been twelve tough years.

"Lee," he said. "Evan."

Moved by an impulse she did not attempt to understand, Lee went to him and kissed him on the cheek. Schaefer stepped forward and gripped a hand that had little strength left in it.

"Hello, Ben," he said.

"I heard about everything," the old man said. "Got an abstract of Hurley's report. Is Sandy with you?"

Schaefer hesitated. "He didn't want to come," he said finally.

Moravia nodded. "I can understand that. I knew he would feel that way."

Lee broke the silence. "Can I get you a drink, Ben?"

"I could use one." He smiled faintly. "Ulcer or no ulcer. How does it feel to see a man get old while you stay young, Evan?"

Schaefer didn't answer that one.

They sat and sipped at their drinks, sensing the tension in the room. Schaefer could not face the old man before him and ask the questions that had to be asked. He was certain of the answers, and Ben had been hurt enough already.

The house swayed with a barely perceptible motion as a gust of wind hit it. It was darker outside now, and the sun was hidden behind a bank of black-edged clouds. It was going to rain, and rain hard. Schaefer could have lifted the house over the storm, but he made no move, letting it come.

They were on their second drink. An electric hush surrounded them, that breathless calm that welcomes the rain. Moravia looked at the floor and began to talk.

"You're wondering why I did it."

Schaefer waited, neither confirming nor denying the statement.

"I took a chance," Moravia said. "I took a long chance, maybe. A man has to do that sometimes. But I didn't know, I couldn't know . . ."

His voice trailed off.

They waited for him.

"More than a hundred natives. Four men from the crew. That's a lot of lives to have on your conscience." Moravia looked up at them, as though asking for their accusation.

Lee said, "Do you mean you *knew* what was going to happen? Is that what you're trying to say? Could you have—"

Her husband's hand silenced her with a touch.

The taut hush was unbearable, waiting.

"Go on, Ben," Schaefer said.

Moravia talked rapidly, wanting to get it out, wanting to get rid of it. "I knew when I first went to Dr. Schaefer that there would be trouble. I hoped it would be minor; I should have known better. But even the machines can't tell you *everything*. There *had* to be an incident, Lee. Can't you see that?"

He looked at her, his eyes pleading.

She looked away.

"A man in my position has to make decisions. That's what he's there for. They are seldom pleasant ones." He lit a cigarette, inhaled it deeply. "Here was a people facing ruin if

I did not act. You saw the land, you know what would have happened to them. I could have closed my eyes, stuck to the letter of the law. I could have let them die, and no one would have questioned that course."

"I know that, Ben," Schaefer said.

The wind came up again, rustling through the room, heavy with the wet smell of rain. Thunder rolled gently in the west.

"The law said that the fourth planet of Aldebaran was forbidden to us." The old man bit the words out, hating them. "It's a good law, we all know that. That world is defenseless, and they have a right to be let alone. And yet I *had* to break that law, or hundreds of thousands of people would starve. You all saw that, but you only saw half the problem. I had to break that law—and I *had to break it in such a way that it would never be broken again*. I had to make absolutely certain that the only precedent I set was a bad one. There *had* to be trouble. Otherwise—"

"The story would have leaked out," Schaefer finished for him. "Men would point to what you had done the next time they wanted to go back to some helpless people. They could have used our trip as a justification for damned near anything. They could say that it had been tried once, and no one had suffered, so why can't we just get those minerals, trade with those natives, start just a *tiny* colony? It would have been the beginning of the end, for millions of human beings. I know why you did what you did, Ben."

Moravia went on as though he had not heard, speaking tonelessly as though reading an indictment. "I put Hurley in command of that ship because I knew he would make the mistakes he made. I picked the men of the crew, because I knew they would act as they acted. I sent *you* out there, knowing you might not come back. I wanted an incident, and I got one. We're safe on that score, for what it's worth. No government will ever speak out about this voyage, because they all share the responsibility. The UN will never

talk. Hurley will keep his mouth shut or face a court-martial. The law is safe, Evan. We spent a hundred lives and saved hundreds of thousands. I've tried to tell myself that's a good record. I've tried. . . ."

"If you had known how many would be killed—if you had known for certain that even one life would be lost—would you have gone ahead?"

The old man stood up. He was very thin and this head was bowed. "It's too much for any man to decide, Evan. I'm probably ruined—my career, everything—and I don't even know whether I did right or wrong. I don't know what the words mean any longer. I tried to kill myself when I heard what I had done, and I couldn't even do that."

Lee went to his side, touched his arm, not speaking, making no judgments.

Moravia turned and looked into Schaefer's eyes. "You were there, Evan. You saw it all. What should I have done, Evan? Tell me. *What should I have done?*"

Schaefer saw again the green grass of the plains, the trees of a new forest, a living land where there had been only death. And he saw old Loquav, and four crewmen ripped apart, and a dark pile of bodies under a hot red sun.

"No man can answer that, Ben," he said softly.

Almost blindly, Moravia stumbled out onto the porch, where the cool wind was fresh in his face. Schaefer joined him there, feeling the coming storm. They stood side by side, separated by a gulf no words could bridge.

A tongue of pure white lightning licked down from black clouds. The world held its breath and then the thunder crashed and boomed away with the wind. Lights came on like yellow fireflies in the darkness, and far below them the treetops danced in the shadows.

A gray wall of water swept over them, drenching them, but they hardly noticed.

They stood there on a house in the sky, each alone, looking down into the wildness of the wind, watching the driving sheets of rain that cleansed their Earth.

ISAAC ASIMOV

When Dr. Asimov is at his most tersely incisive, it would be an easy matter for an editor to write an introduction longer than the story. One could, for instance, use this story as the illustration for a three-page essay on how to construct the short-short-short vignette.

A LOINT OF PAW

THERE WAS no question that Montie Stein had, through clever fraud, stolen better than a hundred thousand dollars. There was also no question that he was apprehended one day after the statute of limitations had expired.

It was his manner of avoiding arrest during that interval that brought on the epoch-making case of the State of New York *vs.* Montgomery Harlow Stein, with all its consequences. It introduced law to the fourth dimension.

For, you see, after having committed the fraud and possessed himself of the hundred grand plus, Stein had calmly entered a time machine, of which he was in illegal possession, and set the controls for seven years and one day in the future.

Stein's lawyer put it simply. Hiding in time was not fundamentally different from hiding in space. If the forces of

law had not uncovered Stein in the seven-year interval that was their hard luck.

The District Attorney pointed out that the statute of limitations was not intended to be a game between the law and the criminal. It was a merciful measure designed to protect a culprit from indefinitely prolonged fear of arrest. For certain crimes, a defined period of apprehension of apprehension (so to speak) was considered punishment enough. But Stein, the D.A. insisted, had not experienced any period of apprehension at all.

Stein's lawyer remained unmoved. The law said nothing about measuring the extent of a culprit's fear and anguish. It simply set a time limit.

The D.A. said that Stein had not lived through the limit.

Defense stated that Stein was seven years older now than at the time of the crime and had therefore lived through the limit.

The D.A. challenged the statement and the defense produced Stein's birth certificate. He was born in 2973. At the time of the crime, 3004, he was thirty-one. Now, in 3011, he was thirty-eight.

The D.A. shouted that Stein was not physiologically thirty-eight, but thirty-one.

Defense pointed out freezingly that the law, once the individual was granted to be mentally competent, recognized solely chronological age, which could be obtained only by subtracting the date of birth from the date of now.

The D.A., growing impassioned, swore that if Stein were allowed to go free half the laws on the books would be useless.

Then change the laws, said Defense, to take time travel into account, but until the laws are changed let them be enforced as written.

Judge Neville Preston took a week to consider and then handed down his decision. It was a turning point in the history of law. It is almost a pity, then, that some people

A LOINT OF PAW

suspect Judge Preston to have been swayed in his way of thinking by the irresistible impulse to phrase his decision as he did.

For that decision, in full, was:

"A niche in time saves Stein."

MILDRED CLINGERMAN

Every time I have read this story, in the course of its purchase and preparation, I have found new levels of meaning in it: and I'm wholly uncertain how it should be introduced. Let's just say that it is a ghostless Christmas story far more terrifying than anything ever written in the Christmas-Ghost tradition: that it's completely different in tone from anything else Mildred Clingerman has done: and that only she, with her warmth and love and understanding, could have created such chill horror.

THE WILD WOOD

IT SEEMED to Margaret Abbott that her children, as they grew older, clung more and more jealously to the family Christmas traditions. Her casual suggestion that, just this once, they try something new in the way of a Christmas tree met with such teen-age scorn and genuine alarm that Margaret hastily abandoned the idea. She found it wryly amusing that the body of ritual she herself had built painstakingly through the years should now have achieve sacrosanctity. Once again, then, she would have to endure the secret malaise of shopping for the tree at Cravolini's Christmas Tree Headquarters. She tried to comfort herself with the thought that one wretchedly disquieting hour every year was not too much to pay for her children's happiness. After all, the episode always came far enough in advance

of Christmas so that it never *quite* spoiled the great day for her.

Buying the tree at Cravolini's began the year Bonnie was four. Bruce had been only a toddler, fat and wriggling, and so difficult for Margaret to carry that Don had finally loaded Margaret with the packages and perched his son on his shoulder. Margaret remembered that night clearly. All day the Abbotts had promised Bonnie that when evening came, when all the shop lights blazed inside the fairy-tale windows, the four of them would stroll the crowded streets, stopping or moving on at Bonnie's command. At some point along the way, the parents privately assured each other, Bonnie would grow tired and fretful but unwilling to relinquish the dazzling street and her moment of power. That would be the time to allow her to choose the all-important tree, which must then, of course, be carried to their car in triumph with Bonnie as valiant, proud helper. Once she had been lured to the car it would be simple to hurry her homeward and to bed. The fragrant green mystery of the tree, sharing their long ride home, would insure her sleepiness and contentment.

As it turned out (why hadn't they foreseen it?), the child showed no sign of fatigue that evening other than her capacious rejection of every Christmas tree pointed out to her. Margaret, whose feet and back ached with Bruce's weight, swallowed her impatience and shook out yet another small tree and twirled its dark bushiness before Bonnie's cool, measuring gaze.

"No," Bonnie said. "It's too little. Daddy, let's go that way." She pointed down one of the darker streets, leading to the area of pawnshops and narrow little cubbyholes that displayed cheap jewelry. These, in turn, verged on the ugly blocks that held credit clothiers, shoe repair shops, and empty, boarded-up buildings where refuse gathered ankle-deep in the entrance ways.

"I won't," Margaret said. "This is silly. What's the matter with this tree, Bonnie? It isn't so small. We certainly aren't

going to wander off down there. I assure you, they don't *have* Christmas trees on that street, do they, Don?"

Don Abbott shook his head, but he was smiling down at his daughter, allowing her to drag him to the street crossing.

Like a damn, lumbering St. Bernard dog, Margaret thought, *towed along by a simpering chee-ild.* She stared after her husband and child as if they were strangers. They were waiting for her at the corner, Don, with the uneasy, sheepish look of a man who knows his wife is angry but unlikely to make a scene. Bonnie was still tugging at his hand, flashing sweet, smug little smiles at her mother. Margaret dropped the unfurled tree with a furious, open-fingered gesture, shifted Bruce so that he rode on one hip, and joined them.

The traffic light changed and they all crossed together. Don slowed and turned a propitiating face to his wife. "You all right, hon? Here, you carry the packages and I'll take Bruce. If you want to, you could go sit in the car. Bonnie and I, we'll just check down this street a little way to make sure. . . . She says they've got some big trees someplace down here." He looked doubtfully down at his daughter then. "Are you sure, Bonnie?" How do you know?"

"I saw them. Come on, Daddy."

"Probably she *did* see some," Don said. "Maybe last week when we drove through town. You know, kids see things we don't notice. Lord, with traffic the way it is, who's got time to see anything? And besides, Margaret, you said she could pick the tree. You said it was time to start building traditions, so the kids would have . . . uh . . . security and all that. Seems to me the tree won't mean much to her if we make her take the one we choose. Anyway, that's the way I figure it."

Margaret moved close to him and took his arm, squeezing it to show both her forgiveness and apology. Don smiled down at her and Margaret's whole body warmed. For a long moment she allowed her eyes to challenge his with the increased moisture and blood-heat that he called "smoky,"

and which denoted for both of them her frank desire. He stared back at her with alerted male tension, and then consciously relaxed.

"Well, not right here and now," he said. "See me later."

Margaret, reassured, skipped a few steps. This delighted the children. The four of them were laughing, then, when they found themselves in front of the derelict store that housed Cravolini's Christmas Tree Headquarters.

Perhaps it was their gaiety, that first year, that made Cravolini's such a pleasant memory for Don and the children. For the first few minutes Margaret, too, had found the dim, barny place charming. It held a bewildering forest of upright trees, aisles and aisles of them, and the odor of fir and spruce and pine was a tingling pleasure to the senses. The floor was covered with damp sawdust, the stained old walls hung with holly wreaths and Della Robbia creations that showed real artistry. Bonnie had gone whooping off in the direction of the taller trees, disappearing from sight so quickly that Don had hurried after her, leaving Margaret standing just inside the door.

She found herself suddenly struggling with that queer and elusive conviction that "this has happened before." Not since her own childhood had she felt so strongly that she was capable of predicting in detail the events that would follow this moment. Already her flesh prickled with foreknowledge of the touch that would come . . . *now*.

She whirled to stare into the inky eyes of the man who stood beside her, his hand poised lightly on her bare forearm. Yes, he was part of the dream she'd returned to—the long, tormenting dream in which she cried out for wholeness, for decency, and love, only to have the trees close in on her, shutting away the light. "The trees, the trees . . ." Margaret murmured. The dream began to fade. She looked down across the packages she held at the dark hand that smoothed the golden hairs on her forearm. *I got those last summer when I swam so much.*

She straightened suddenly as the dream ended, trying to

shake off the languor that held her while a strange, ugly man stroked her arm. She managed to jerk away from him, spilling the packages at her feet. He knelt with her to pick them up, his head so close to hers that she smelled his dirty, oily hair. The odor of it conjured up for her (*again?*) the small, cramped room and the bed with the thin mattress that never kept out the cold. Onions were browning in olive oil there over the gas plate. The man standing at the window with his back turned . . . *He needed her; nobody else needed her in just that way. Besides, Mama had said to watch over Alberto. How could she leave him alone? But Mama was dead. . . And how could Mama know all the bad things Alberto had taught her?*

"Margaret." Don's voice called her rather sharply out of the dream that had again enveloped her. Margaret's sigh was like a half-sob. She laughed up at her husband, and he helped her to her feet, and gathered up the packages. The strange man was introducing himself to Don. He was Mr. Cravolini, the proprietor. He had seen that the lady was very pale, ready to faint, perhaps. He'd stepped up to assist her, unfortunately frightening her, since his step had not been heard—due, doubtless, to the great depth of the sawdust on the floor. Don, she saw, was listening to the overtones of the apology. If Mr. Cravolini's voice displayed the smallest hint of insolence and pride in the lies he was telling, then Don would grab him by the shirt front and shake him till he stopped lying and begged for mercy. Don did not believe in fighting. Often while he and Margaret lay warmly and happily in bed together Don spoke regretfully of his "wild-kid" days, glad that with maturity he need not prove on every street corner that he was not afraid to fight, glad to admit to Margaret that often he'd been scared, and always he'd been sick afterwards. Don approved of social lies, the kind that permitted people to live and work together without too much friction. So Mr. Cravolini had made a mistake. Finding Margaret alone, he'd made a pass. He knew better now. OK. Forget it. Thus Margaret read her hus-

band's face and buried very deeply the sharp, small stab of disappointment. *A fight would have ended it, for good.* She frowned a little with the effort to understand her own chaotic thoughts, her vision of a door that had almost closed on a narrow, stifling room, but was now wedged open . . . waiting.

Don led her down one of the long aisles of trees to where Bonnie and Bruce were huddled beside their choice. Margaret scarcely glanced at the tree. Don was annoyed with her—half-convinced, as he always was, that Margaret had invited the pass. Not by an overt signal on her part, but simply because she forgot to look busy and preoccupied.

"Don't go dawdling along in that wide-eyed dreamy way," he'd said so often. "I don't know what it is, but you've got that look—as if you'd say yes to a square meal or to a panhandler or to somebody's bed."

Bonnie was preening herself on the tree she'd chosen, chanting a maddening little refrain that Bruce would comprehend at any moment: "And Bru-cie did-unt he-ulp. . . ." Already Bruce recognized that the singsong words meant something scornful and destructive to his dignity. His face puckered, and he drew the three long breaths that preceded his best screaming.

Margaret hoisted him up into her arms, while Don and Bonnie hastily beat a retreat with the excuse that they must pay Mr. Cravolini for the tree. Bruce screamed his fury at a world that kept trying to confine him, limit him, or otherwise squeeze his outside ego down to puny, civilized proportions. Margaret paced up and down the aisles with him, wondering why Don and Bonnie were taking so long.

Far back at the rear of the store building, where the lights were dimmest, Margaret caught sight of a display of hand-made candles. Still joggling Bruce up and down as if she were churning butter, she paused to look them over. Four pale blue candles of varying lengths rose gracefully from a flat base molded to resemble a sheaf of laurel leaves. Very

nice, and probably very expensive. Margaret turned away to find Mr. Cravolini standing immediately in front of her.

"Do you like those candles?" he asked softly.

"Where is my husband?" Margaret kept her eyes on Bruce's fine blond hair. *Don't let the door open any more. . . .*

"Your husband has gone to bring his car. He and your daughter. The tree is too large to carry so far. Why are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid. . . ." She glanced fleetingly into the man's eyes, troubled again that her knowledge of his identity wavered just beyond reality. "Have we met before?" she asked.

"I almost saw you once," Cravolini said. "I was standing at a window. You were reflected in it, but when I turned around you were gone. There was nobody in the room but my sister . . . the stupid cow . . ." Cravolini spat into the sawdust. "That day I made a candle for you. Wait." He reached swiftly behind the stacked packing boxes that held the candles on display. He had placed it in her hand before she got a clear look at it. Sickeningly pink, loathsomely slick and hand-filling. It would have been cleaner, more honest, she thought, if it had been a frank reproduction of what it was intended to suggest. She dropped it and ran awkwardly with the baby towards the lights at the entrance way. Don was just parking the car. She wrenched the door open and half fell into the front seat. Bonnie had rushed off with Don to bring out the tree. Margaret buried her face in Bruce's warm, sweet-smelling neck and nuzzled him till he laughed aloud. She never quite remembered afterwards the ride home that night. She might have been very quiet—in one of her "lost" moods, as Don called them. The next morning she was surprised to see that Bonnie had picked one of Cravolini's largest, finest trees, and to discover the tissue-wrapped pale blue candles he had given Bonnie as a special Christmas gift.

Every year after that Margaret promised herself that this

year she'd stay at home on the tree-buying night. But something always forced her to go—some errand, a last bit of shopping, or Don's stern injunctions not to be silly, that he could not handle Bonnie, Bruce, *and* the biggest tree in town. Once there, she never managed to escape Cravolini's unctuous welcome. If she sat in the car, then he came out to speak to her. Much better go inside and stick close by Don and the children. But that never quite worked, either. Somehow the three of them eluded her; she might hear their delighted shouts two aisles over, but when she hastened in their direction, she found only Cravolini waiting. She never eluded him. Sometimes on New Year's Day, when she heard so much about resolutions on radio and television, she thought that surely this year she'd tell Don at least some of the things Cravolini said to her—did to her—enough, anyway, to assure the Abbotts never going back there again. But she never did. It would be difficult to explain to Don why she'd waited so long to speak out about it. Why hadn't she told him that first night?

She could only shake her head in puzzlement and distaste for motivations that were tangled in a long, bad dream. And how could a woman of almost-forty explain and deeply explore a woman in her twenties? Even if they were the same woman, it was impossible.

When Cravolini's "opening announcement" card arrived each year, Margaret was jolted out of the peacefulness that inevitably built in her between Christmases. It was as if a torn and raw portion of her brain healed in the interim. *But the door was still invitingly wedged open, and every Christmas something tried to force her inside.* Margaret's spirit fought the assailant that seemed to accompany Mr. Cravolini (hovering there beyond the lights, flitting behind the trees), but the fighting left her weak and tired and without any words to help her communicate her distress. *If only Don would see,* she thought. *If there were no need for words. It ought to be like that.* . . . At such times she accused her-

self of indulging in Bruce's outgrown baby fury, crying out against things as they are.

Every time she saw Cravolini the dream gained in reality and continuity. He was very friendly with the Abbotts now. They were among his "oldest customers," privileged to receive his heartiest greetings along with the beautiful candles and wreaths he gave the children. Margaret had hoped this year that she could convince Bonnie and Bruce to have a different kind of tree—something modern and a little startling, perhaps, like tumbleweeds sprayed pink and mounted on a tree-shaped form. Anything. But they laughed at her bad taste, and were as horrified as if she were trying to by-pass Christmas itself.

I wonder if I'll see *her* this year, Margaret thought. Alberto's sister. She knew so much about her now—that she was dumb, but that she had acute, morbidly sensitive hearing—that once she'd heard Cravolini murmuring his lust to Margaret, because that was the time the animal-grunting, laughing sounds had come from the back of the store, there where extra trees lay stacked against the wall. Her name was Angela, and she was very gross, very fat, very ugly. Unmarriageable, Alberto said. Part of what Margaret knew of Angela came from Alberto's whispered confidences (unwanted, oh unasked for!), and the rest grew out of the dream that lived and walked with Margaret there in the crumbling building, beginning the moment she entered the door, ending only with Don's voice, calling her back to sanity and to another life.

There were self-revelatory moments in her life with Don when Margaret was able to admit to herself that the dream had power to call her back. She would like to know the ending. It was like a too-short book that left one hungry and dissatisfied. So this year she gave way to the children, to tradition, and went once again to Cravolini's.

Margaret was aware that she looked her best in the dull red velveteen suit. The double golden hoops at her ears tinkled a little when she walked and made her feel like an ar-

rogant gypsy. She and Don had stopped at their favorite small bar for several drinks while the children finished their shopping.

Maybe it's the drinks, Margaret thought, and maybe it's the feeling that tonight, at last, I'll settle Mr. Cravolini that makes me walk so jut-bosomed and proud. Don, already on his way with her to Cravolini's, had dropped into a department store with the mumbled excuse that always preceded his gift-buying for Margaret. He had urged her to go on alone, reminding her that the children might be there waiting. For once, Margaret went fearlessly, almost eagerly.

The children were not waiting, but the woman was. *Angela*. Margaret knew her instantly, just as she'd known Albert. Angela stared up and down at Margaret and did not bother to hide her amusement, or her knowledge of Margaret's many hot, protesting encounters with her brother. Margaret started to speak, but the woman only jerked her head meaningfully towards the back of the store. Margaret did not move. The dream was beginning. *Alberto is waiting, there beyond the stacked-high Christmas trees. See the soft, springy nest he has built for you with pine boughs.* Margaret stirred uneasily and began to move down the aisle, Angela beside her.

I must go to him. He needs me. Mama said to look after Alberto. That I would win for myself a crown in Heaven . . . Did she know how unnatural a brother Alberto is? Did she know how he learned the seven powers from the old, forbidden books? And taught them to me? He shall have what he desires, and so shall I. Here, Alberto, comes the proud, silly spirit you've won . . . and listen, Don and the children are coming in the door.

Margaret found the soft, springy bed behind the stacked trees. Alberto was there, waiting. She heard Don call for her and struggled to answer, struggled desperately to rise to go to him. But she was so fat, so heavy, so ugly. . . . She heard the other woman's light, warm voice answering, heard her happy, foolish joking with the children, her mock-protesta-

tions, as always, at the enormous tree they picked. Margaret fought wildly and caught a last glimpse of the Abbotts, the four of them, and saw the dull red suit the woman wore, heard the final, flirtatious tinkling of the golden earrings, and then they were gone.

A whole year I must wait, Margaret thought, and maybe next year they won't come. She will see to that.

"My sister, my love . . ." Alberto crooned at her ear.

WILL STANTON

Long-range, grand-scale prophecies are part of the day's routine work in science fiction; but it would take a brave man to predict (writing, as I am, in July, 1957) where the Dodgers will be playing in 1958. One thing, however, I am sure of: even the air (if that is the word) of Southern California cannot change the essential nature of the true

DODGER FAN

"SOME VACATION." Jerome snapped off the TV. "All year I look forward to a little rest and relaxation. And what happens? The first game we lose on an error and a wild pitch—twelve innings. Game two is rained out. Today we get our hits—grand total."

Cleo, his wife, unwrapped a fresh stick of gum. "Five hits," she said. "Campy two, Duke one—"

"Who cares?" He walked to the window and looked out disgustedly. "You call that baseball?" He picked up his hat and headed for the door. "Some vacation."

"Erskine pitches tomorrow," Cleo said.

"Tomorrow the President could pitch," Jerome said, "I wouldn't be watching." He left the apartment and headed down the street. After a couple of blocks he hesitated and then stepped back and looked up at the gold sign. He couldn't remember seeing it before.

WANT TO VISIT MARS? STEP INSIDE.

Jerome stepped inside. He hadn't been going anyplace in particular. The man behind the counter was very friendly.

"Glad to have you aboard," he said. "You're the first to come in all day, and I was beginning to wonder. You see, I took a special course in Earth Psychology, so this is of great interest to me. What prompted you to visit Mars?"

"I just wanted to get out of town," Jerome said, "Detroit, Baltimore, Mars—it don't make any special difference."

"I graduated with honors, you know, from the Academy of Earthly Advertising and Customer Response. I was groomed for this job. So naturally your reaction—"

"If you got a trip to Philly, I'll take that," Jerome said. "Anything so I don't have to hear about that crummy outfit they call a ball club. Mars is OK."

"I see. You understand the trip would be brief. We must depend on the space-warp continuum, which will be effective for only six more days. We would have to leave at once."

"It's my vacation," Jerome said. "I can do what I want."

When he stepped down on Mars, all of the big wheels were waiting. The Chairman of Lions Interplanetary, the Editor of *Martian Digest*, the head of the Future Voters' League, and others. The welcoming address was delivered by the President of the Solar Council.

"In conclusion," he said, "at this first meeting of the dominant cultures of the planetary system, may I extend to you, Jerome of Earth, the keys to our cities and the hearts of our people, in the fervent hope—"

Jerome had taken a pair of clippers from his pocket and was trimming his nails. "Likewise," he said.

"—in the fervent hope," said the President, "that the civilizations we represent may gain by this association some insight—"

"Looks like a mighty nice little planet you've got here," Jerome said.

After the ceremonies there was a small banquet at the Palace with some informal entertainment, and somewhat

later Jerome was installed in the visitor's suite. He slept well.

The next morning he was treated to a gala patio breakfast, with the Royal Martian Ballet performing on the terrace below. "You are surprised to feel so much at home," said the President, smiling. "You see, we have been listening to your radio for many years, and so have learned your language, your customs, your likes and dislikes—"

"I like my eggs over easy," Jerome said. "But these are OK." He poked at them politely with his fork. "Anyhow, it's a change."

"We have planned so long for this occasion," said the President, "to show you our way of life, only to find our time so short—"

"Why don't we just drive around for a while," said Jerome. "If you got a car?"

They visited the Bureau of Statistical Research and Loving Kindness, and the Criminal Building, and Jerome left his footprints in concrete at the Sanatorium of the Daughters of the Martian Revolution.

"Actually," said the President, "the Revolution never amounted to much, but these ladies are the daughters of it and they're quite well to do. Now this afternoon—"

"As long as it's my vacation," said Jerome, "let's take in a ball game."

"First of all there is the Memorial Service of the Young Republicans' Club and then—" He paused. "A ball game, you say. Yes." He seemed to be thinking. "Very well, then, suppose we begin by having a bite of lunch."

There were fourteen courses, with appropriate wines and Solar Cola, so the luncheon was rather long. Long enough for the Martian Engineers and the Royal Construction Corps to erect a triple-decked stadium, and for two baseball teams to learn the game by means of microwave hypnosis. And for 120,000 volunteer fans to receive a short treatment of mass-suggestion. Jerome and the President arrived at the park and took their seats. The umpire dusted off home plate,

the first baseman took a chew of tobacco, the batter knocked the dirt out of his spikes and the game began.

In the first inning there was a triple play and a triple steal. One of the managers was thrown out and the umpire was hit by a pop-bottle. Jerome frowned. "I only wish Cleo was here," he said.

"You miss her a great deal," said the President.

"She never did see an ump get flattened," he said. "Not from this close anyhow."

In the second inning there was an inside-the-park grand slam home run, the third baseman made a triple error, and Jerome caught a pop foul. "Pretty fair seats," he said.

Returning to the Palace, the President outlined the rest of the day's schedule. "We're having a cocktail party in your honor," he said, "followed by a state dinner and the première of a new opera. Then a reception and a masked ball—"

"I thought I'd turn in early tonight," Jerome said. "Have a sandwich and a beer in my room and read the baseball almanac awhile."

"A sandwich and a beer in your room," said the President, "I see. Well, there should be beer in the icebox. If there's any special kind of sandwich you'd like we can stop at a delicatessen—"

"No special kind," Jerome said. The car turned in at the Palace.

The second morning was as busy as the first. The Tri-Centennial Military Review and Air Command Proceedings took up most of it so there was barely time to visit the Museum of Metaphysics and Household Design before lunch.

"This afternoon," said the President over the soup, "we have a program of unusual interest—"

"Who's pitching?" Jerome asked.

The Royal Construction Corps was forced to call on its civilian reserve to help rebuild the stadium it had torn down the night before. No one on Mars had considered the pos-

sibility that anybody would want to see more than one baseball game.

Driving home after the game, the President smiled. "Nothing wrong with a little relaxation, is there? Especially since tomorrow is going to be our big day. Something like your Independence Day: the Annual Opening of the Canals, address by the Philosopher-in-Chief, Dedication of the Five Hundredth Congress of Scientific—"

"Sounds great," said Jerome. "Be playing a double-header I presume?"

"—of Scientific and Cultural Evalua—" The President paused. "A double-header, you say. Well, yes—naturally. If you'll excuse me a moment I have to make a phone call." He was in time. They had only ripped out the first three rows of seats.

Returning to the Palace the third day, Jerome seemed restless. "Nice of you to ask me up," he said, "and all, but I'd better be getting home."

"There are still two days," the President said. "It will be years before conditions will enable us to communicate with Earth again. There is much we have to give you: a cure for the common cold—the formula for universal peace—plans for a thirty-five-inch color TV set the average boy can build for ten dollars—"

"I wouldn't mind staying on," Jerome said, "I'd like to see that little southpaw pitch tomorrow, but I got to get home. I promised Cleo I'd pick up the laundry, for one thing—"

"We had envisioned an exchange program," said the President, "of specialized personnel. Some of us going to Earth—some of you coming here."

"We could use a left-handed pitcher," Jerome said. "Probably we could give you a pretty good third baseman."

The President nodded. "At a moment like this there isn't very much I can say."

The trip to Earth was uneventful. Jerome was glad to be

home. He hurried up to the apartment. Cleo was sitting in the same chair, watching the game.

"What inning?" he asked.

"Last of the third, no score," she said. "Been away?"

"Yeah." He settled down on the couch. "Newcombe pitching, huh?"

She nodded. "Got his fast ball working pretty good. Where'd you go—Canarsie?"

"Mars," he said. He started to unlace his shoes. "Campy's thumb bother him any?"

"Still got it taped, but he's swinging OK." She unwrapped a stick of gum. "What's it like up there—nice?"

"Yeah," he said, "seemed like a pretty good crowd, what I saw of them. What did Reese do last time up?"

"Grounded to short," she said. "Why don't you come to the meeting Thursday—the Current Events Club? Give a little talk about them? Might be interesting."

Jerome went up to the set and adjusted the dial. "Talk about who?"

"Now you got it too dark," she said. "Talk about these friends you went to see. Up to Mars. They worth while getting to know?"

Jerome shook his head slowly. "Can't hit the curve ball," he said.

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Most science fiction writers begin incredibly early in life (at least four of the authors in this volume were well-established professionals in their teens); but Robert F. Young is an almost unique exception. He did not start writing till he was thirty-three, nor succeed in selling till he was thirty-seven. "I suspect," he writes, "that I was afflicted with the attitude which most would-be writers take toward writing: 'I'd write if I could only find the time.' It took me longer than it does the majority of writers to discover the essential truth that the only way to 'find' time is to take it." Ours is, thank God, one profession which has no "forty plus" problem of employment; now at the start of his forties, Mr. Young is one of the leading writers of the newest generation, with dozens of publications in all of the top magazines. His book appearances have so far been few; but you'll certainly be seeing more from a writer who can create and develop so powerful a visual symbol as

GODDESS IN GRANITE

WHEN HE reached the upper ridge of the forearm, Marten stopped to rest. The climb had not winded him but the chin was still miles away, and he wanted to conserve as much of his strength as possible for the final ascent to the face.

He looked back the way he had come—down the slope

of the tapered forearm ridge to the mile-wide slab of the hand; down to the granite giantess-fingers protruding like sculptured promontories into the water. He saw his rented inboard bobbing in the blue bay between forefinger and thumb, and beyond the bay, the shimmering waste of the southern sea.

He shrugged his pack into a more comfortable position and checked the climbing equipment attached to his web belt—his piton pistol in its self-locking holster, his extra clips of piton cartridges, the air-tight packet that contained his oxygen tablets, his canteen. Satisfied, he drank sparingly from the canteen and replaced it in its refrigerated case. Then he lit a cigarette and blew smoke at the morning sky.

The sky was a deep, cloudless blue, and Alpha Virginis beat brightly down from the blueness, shedding its warmth and brilliance on the gynecomorphous mountain range known as the Virgin.

She lay upon her back, her blue lakes of eyes gazing eternally upward. From his vantage point on her forearm, Marten had a good view of the mountains of her breasts. He looked at them contemplatively. They towered perhaps 8,000 feet above the chest-plateau, but, since the plateau itself was a good 10,000 feet above sea level, their true height exceeded 18,000 feet. However, Marten wasn't discouraged. It wasn't the mountains that he wanted.

Presently he dropped his eyes from their snow-capped crests and resumed his trek. The granite ridge rose for a while, then slanted downward, widening gradually into the rounded reaches of the upper arm. He had an excellent view of the Virgin's head now, though he wasn't high enough to see her profile. The 11,000-foot cliff of her cheek was awesome at this range, and her hair was revealed for what it really was—a vast forest spilling riotously down to the lowlands, spreading out around her massive shoulders almost to the sea. It was green now. In autumn it would be brown, then gold; in winter, black.

Centuries of rainfall and wind had not perturbed the

graceful contours of the upper arm. It was like walking along a lofty promenade. Marten made good time. Still, it was nearly noon before he reached the shoulder-slope, and he realized that he had badly underestimated the Virgin's vastness.

The elements had been less kind to the shoulder-slope, and he had to go slower, picking his way between shallow gullies, avoiding cracks and crevices. In places the granite gave way to other varieties of igneous rock, but the over-all color of the Virgin's body remained the same—a grayish-white, permeated with pink, startlingly suggestive of the hue of human skin.

Marten found himself thinking of her sculptors, and for the thousandth time he speculated as to why they had sculptured her. In many ways, the problem resembled such Earth enigmas as the Egyptian pyramids, the Sacsahuaman Fortress, and the Baalbek Temple of the Sun. For one thing, it was just as irresolvable, and probably always would be, for the ancient race that had once inhabited Alpha Virginis IX had either died out centuries ago or had migrated to the stars. In either case, they had left no written records behind them.

Basically, however, the two enigmas were different. When you contemplated the pyramids, the Fortress, and the Temple of the Sun, you did not wonder *why* they had been built—you wondered *how* they had been built. With the Virgin, the opposite held true. She had begun as a natural phenomenon—an enormous geological upheaval—and actually all her sculptors had done, herculean though their labor had undoubtedly been, was to add the finishing touches and install the automatic subterranean pumping system that, for centuries, had supplied her artificial lakes of eyes with water from the sea.

And perhaps therein lay the answer, Marten thought. Perhaps their only motivation had been a desire to improve upon nature. There certainly wasn't any factual basis for the theosophical, sociological, and psychological motivations pos-

tulated by half a hundred Earth anthropologists (none of whom had ever *really* seen her) in half a hundred technical volumes. Perhaps the answer was as simple as that. . . .

The southern reaches of the shoulder-slope were less eroded than the central and northern reaches, and Marten edged closer and closer to the south rim. He had a splendid view of the Virgin's left side, and he stared, fascinated, at the magnificent, purple-shadowed escarpment stretching away to the horizon. Five miles from its juncture with the shoulder-slope, it dwindled abruptly to form her waist; three miles farther on, it burgeoned out to form her left hip; then, just before it faded into the lavender distances, it blended into the gigantic curve of her thigh.

The shoulder was not particularly steep, yet his chest was tight, his lips dry, when he reached its summit. He decided to rest for a while, and he removed his pack and sat down and propped his back against it. He raised his canteen to his lips and took a long cool draft. He lit another cigarette.

From his new eminence he had a much better view of the Virgin's head, and he gazed at it spellbound. The mesa of her face was still hidden from him, of course—except for the lofty tip of her granite nose; but the details of her cheek and chin stood out clearly. Her cheekbone was represented by a rounded spur, and the spur blended almost imperceptibly with the chamfered rim of her cheek. Her proud chin was a cliff in its own right, falling sheerly—much too sheerly, Marten thought—to the graceful ridge of her neck.

Yet, despite her sculptors' meticulous attention to details, the Virgin, viewed from so close a range, fell far short of the beauty and perfection they had intended. That was because you could see only part of her at a time: her cheek, her hair, her breasts, the distant contour of her thigh. But when you viewed her from the right altitude, the effect was altogether different. Even from a height of ten miles, her beauty was perceptible; at 75,000 feet, it was undeniable. But you had to go higher yet—had to find the exact level,

in fact—before you could see her as her sculptors had meant her to be seen.

To Marten's knowledge, he was the only Earthman who had ever found that level, who had ever seen the Virgin as she really was; seen her emerge into a reality uniquely her own—an unforgettable reality, the equal of which he had never encountered on Earth or anywhere else.

Perhaps being the only one had had something to do with her effect on him; that, plus the fact that he had been only twenty at the time; twenty, he thought wonderingly. He was thirty-two now. Yet the intervening years were no more than a thin curtain, a curtain he had parted a thousand times.

He parted it again—

After his mother's third marriage he had made up his mind to become a spaceman, and he had quit college and obtained a berth as cabin boy on the starship *Ulysses*. The *Ulysses* destination was Alpha Virginis IX; the purpose of its voyage was to chart potential ore deposits.

Marten had heard about the Virgin, of course. She was one of the seven hundred wonders of the galaxy. But he had never given her a second thought—till he saw her in the main viewport of the orbiting *Ulysses*. Afterwards, he gave her considerable thought and, several days after planet-fall, he "borrowed" one of the ship's life-rafts and went exploring. The exploit had netted him a week in the brig upon his return, but he hadn't minded. The Virgin had been worth it.

The altimeter of the life-raft had registered 55,000 feet when he first sighted her, and he approached her at that level. Presently he saw the splendid ridges of her calves and thighs creep by beneath him, the white desert of her stomach; the delicate cwm of her navel. He was above the twin mountains of her breasts, within sight of the mesa of her face, before it occurred to him that, by lifting the raft, he might gain a much better perspective.

He canceled his horizontal momentum and depressed the

altitude button. The raft climbed swiftly. 60,000 feet . . . 65,000 . . . 70,000. It was like focusing a telescreen. 80,000 . . . His heart was pounding now. 90,000 . . . The oxygen dial indicated normal pressure, but he could hardly breathe.

100,000, 101,000—Not quite high enough. 102,300 . . . *Thou are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, Comely as Jerusalem, Terrible as an army with banners* . . . 103,211 . . . *The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman* . . . 103,288—

He jammed the altitude button hard, locking the focus. He could not breathe at all now—at least not for the first, ecstatic moment. He had never seen anyone quite like her. It was early spring, and her hair was black; her eyes were a springtime blue. And it seemed to him that the mesa of her face abounded in compassion, that the red rimrock of her mouth was curved in a gentle smile . . .

She lay there immobile by the sea, a Brobdingnagian beauty come out of the water to bask forever in the sun. The barren lowlands were a summer beach; the glittering ruins of a nearby city were an earring dropped from her ear; and the sea was a summer lake, the life-raft a metallic gull hovering high above the littoral—

And in the transparent belly of the gull sat an infinitesimal man who would never be the same again. . . .

Marten closed the curtain, but it was some time before the after-image of the memory faded away. When it finally did so, he found that he was staring with a frightening fixity toward the distant cliff of the Virgin's chin.

Roughly, he estimated its height. Its point, or summit, was on an approximate level with the crest of the cheek. That gave him 11,000 feet. To obtain the distance he had to climb to reach the face-mesa, all he had to do was to deduct the height of the neck-ridge. He figured the neck-ridge at about 8,000 feet. 8,000 from 11,000 gave him 3,000—

3,000 feet!

It was impossible. Even with a piton pistol, it was impossible. The pitch was vertical all the way, and from where he sat he couldn't discern the faintest indication of a crack or a ledge on the granite surface.

He could never do it, he told himself. Never. It would be absurd for him even to try. It might cost him his life. And even if he could do it, even if he could climb that polished precipice all the way to the face-mesa, could he get back down again? True, his piton pistol would make the descent relatively easy, but would he have enough strength left? The atmosphere on Alpha Virginis IX thinned rapidly after 10,000 feet, and while oxygen tablets helped, they could keep you going only for a limited period of time. After that—

But the arguments were old ones. He had used them on himself a hundred, a thousand times . . . He stood up resignedly. He shrugged his pack into place. He took a final look down the nine-mile slope of the arm to the giantess-fingers jutting into the sea, then he turned and started across the tableland of the upper chest toward the beginning of the neck-ridge.

II

The sun had long since passed its meridian when he came opposite the gentle col between the mountains. A cold wind breathed down the slopes, drifting across the tableland. The wind was sweet, and he knew there must be flowers on the mountains—crocuses perhaps, or their equivalent, growing high on the snow-soft peaks.

He wondered why he did not want to climb the mountains, why it had to be the mesa. The mountains presented the greater difficulties, and therefore the greater challenge. Why, then, did he neglect them for the mesa?

He thought he knew. The beauty of the mountains was shallow, lacked the deeper meaning of the beauty of the

mesa. They could never give him what he wanted if he climbed them a thousand times. It was the mesa—with its blue and lovely lakes—or nothing.

He turned his eyes away from the mountains and concentrated on the long slope that led to the neck-ridge. The pitch was gentle, but treacherous. He moved slowly. A slip could send him rolling, and there was nothing he could grasp to stop himself. He noticed the shortness of his breath and wondered at it, till he remembered the altitude. But he did not break into his oxygen tablets yet; he would have a much more poignant need for them later.

By the time he reached the ridge, the sun had half-completed its afternoon journey. But he wasn't dismayed. He had already given up the idea of assaulting the chin-cliff today. He had been presumptuous in the first place to have imagined himself capable of conquering the Virgin in a single day.

It was going to take at least two.

The ridge was over a mile wide, its curvature barely perceptible. Marten made good time. All the while he advanced, he was conscious of the chin-cliff looming higher and higher above him, but he did not look at it, he was afraid to look at it, till it loomed so close that it occulted half the sky, and then he had to look at it, had to raise his eyes from the granite swell of the throat and focus them on the appalling wall that now constituted his future.

His future was bleak. It contained no hand- or footholds; no ledges, no cracks, no projections. In a way he was relieved, for if no means existed for him to climb the chin-cliff, then he couldn't climb it. But in another way he was overwhelmingly disappointed. Gaining the face-mesa was more than a mere ambition, it was an obsession; and the physical effort that the task involved, the danger, the obstacles—all were an integral part of the obsession.

He could return the way he had come, down the arm to his inboard, and back to the isolated colony; and he could rent a flier from the hard-bitten, taciturn natives just as

easily as he had rented the inboard. In less than an hour after takeoff. he could land on the face-mesa.

But he would be cheating, and he knew it. Not cheating the Virgin, but cheating himself.

There was one other way, but he rejected it now for the same reason he had rejected it before. The top of the Virgin's head was an unknown quantity, and, while the trees of her hair might make climbing easier, the distance to be climbed was still over three times the height of the chin-cliff, and the pitch was probably just as precipitous.

No, it was the chin-cliff or nothing. The way things looked now, it was nothing. But he consoled himself with the fact that he had examined only a relatively small section of the cliff. Perhaps the outlying sections would be less forbidding. Perhaps—

He shook his head. Wishful thinking would get him nowhere. It would be time to hope *after* he found a means of ascent, not before. He started along the base of the cliff, then paused. While he had stood there, staring at the stupendous wall, Alpha Virginis had descended unobtrusively into the molten sea. The first star was already visible in the east, and the hue of the Virgin's breasts had transmuted from gold to purple.

Reluctantly, Marten decided to postpone his investigation till tomorrow. The decision proved to be a sensible one. Darkness was upon him before he had his sleeping bag spread out, and with it came the penetrating cold for which the planet was notorious throughout the galaxy.

He set the thermostat on the sleeping bag, then he undressed and crawled into the warm interior. He munched a supper biscuit and allotted himself two swallows of water from his canteen. Suddenly he remembered that he had missed his midday meal—and had not even known the difference.

There was a parallel there somewhere, an element of *déjà vu*. But the connection was so tenuous that he could not pin the other moment down. It would occur to him later,

he knew, but such was the nature of the human mind that it would occur seemingly as the result of another chain of associations, and he would not remember the original connection at all.

He lay there, staring at the stars. The dark mass of the Virgin's chin rose up beside him, hiding half the sky. He should have felt forlorn, frightened even. But he did not. He felt safe, secure. For the first time in many years, he knew contentment.

There was an unusual constellation almost directly overhead. More than anything else, it made him think of a man astride a horse. The man carried an elongated object on his shoulder, and the object could have been any one of a number of things, depending on the way you looked at the stars that comprised it—a rifle, perhaps, or a staff; maybe even a fishing pole.

To Marten, it looked like a scythe . . .

He turned on his side, luxuriating in his tiny oasis of warmth. The Virgin's chin was soft with starlight now, and the night slept in soft and silent splendor . . . That was one of his own lines, he thought drowsily—a part of that fantastic hodgepodge of words and phrases he had put together eleven years ago under the title of *Rise Up, My Lovel*. A part of the book that had brought him fame and fortune—and Lelia.

Lelia . . . She seemed so long ago, and in a way, she was. And yet, in another way, a strange, poignant way, she was yesterday—

The first time he saw her she was standing in one of those little antique bars so popular, then, in Old York. Standing there all alone, tall, dark-haired, Junoesque, sipping her mid-afternoon drink as though women like her were the most common phenomena in the galaxy.

He had been positive, even before she turned her head, that her eyes were blue, and blue they proved to be; blue with the blueness of mountain lakes in spring, blue with the

beauty of a woman waiting to be loved. Boldly, he walked over and stood beside her, knowing it was now or never, and asked if he might buy her a drink.

To his astonishment, she accepted. She did not tell him till later that she had recognized him. He was so naïve at the time that he did not even know that he was a celebrity in Old York, though he should have known. His book certainly had been successful enough.

He had knocked it off the preceding summer—the summer the *Ulysses* returned from Alpha Virginis IX; the summer he quit his berth as cabin boy, forever cured of his ambition to be a spaceman. During the interim consumed by the voyage, his mother had remarried again; and when he found out, he rented a summer cottage in Connecticut as far away from her as he could get. Then, driven by forces beyond his ken, he sat down and began to write.

Rise Up, My Lovel had dealt with the stellar Odyssey of a young adventurer in search of a substitute for God and with his ultimate discovery of that substitute in a woman. The reviewers shouted "Epic!", and the Freudian psychologists who, after four centuries of adversity, still hadn't given up psychoanalyzing writers, shouted "Death-wish!" The diverse appraisals combined happily to stir up interest in the limited literary world and to pave the way for a second printing, and then a third. Overnight, Marten had become that most incomprehensible of all literary phenomena—a famous first-novelist.

But he hadn't realized, till now, that his fame involved physical recognition. "I read your book, Mr. Marten," the dark-haired girl standing beside him said. "I didn't like it."

"What's your name?" he asked. Then: "Why?"

"Lelia Vaughn . . . Because your heroine is impossible."

"I don't think she's impossible," Marten said.

"You'll be telling me next that she has a prototype."

"Maybe I will." The bartender served them, and Marten picked up his glass and sipped the cool blueness of his Martian julep. "Why is she impossible?"

"Because she's not a woman," Lelia said. "She's a symbol."

"A symbol of what?"

"I—I don't know. Anyway, she's not human. She's too beautiful, too perfect—She's a criterion, really."

"You look just like her," Marten said.

She dropped her eyes then, and for a while she was silent. Presently: "There's an ancient cliché that bears mentioning at this point," she said: "I'll bet you tell that to all the girls—' But somehow I don't think you do."

"You're right," Marten said. "I don't." Then: "It's so close in here—can't we go walking somewhere?"

"All right . . ."

Old York was an anachronism kept alive by a handful of literati who doted on the prestige lent by old buildings, old streets, and old ways of life. It was a grim, canyonesque grotesquerie compared to its pretty new cousin on Mars; but during the years, parts of it had taken on some of the coloring and some of the atmosphere once associated with the left bank of Paris, and if the season was spring and you were falling in love, Old York was a lovely place in which to be.

They walked through the dreaming desuetude of ancient avenues, in the cool shadows of buildings mellowed by the passage of time. They lingered in the wilderness of Central Park, and the sky was blue with spring, the trees adorned with the pale greenness of nascent leaves. . . . It had been the loveliest of afternoons, and afterwards, the loveliest of evenings. The stars had never shone so brightly, nor had the moon ever been so full, the hours so swift, the minutes so sweet. Marten's head had been light, seeing Lelia home, his footsteps unsteady; but it wasn't till later, sitting on his apartment steps, that he had realized how hungry he was, and simultaneously realized that he hadn't eaten a morsel of food since morning. . . .

Deep in the alien night, Marten stirred, awakened. The strange star-patterns shocked him for a moment, and then he remembered where he was and what he was going to

do. Sleep tiptoed back around him and he turned dreamily in the warmth of his electronic cocoon. Freeing one arm, he reached out till his fingers touched the reassuring surface of the star-kissed cliff. He sighed.

III

Dawn wore a pink dress and crept across the land like a timid girl. Her sister Morning followed, dressed in blue, the sun a dazzling locket on her breast.

There was a tightness in Marten, a tightness compounded of anticipation and dread. He did not permit himself to think. Methodically he ate his concentrated breakfast, packed his sleeping bag. Then he began a systematic examination of the Virgin's chin.

In the morning light, the cliff did not seem nearly so awesome as it had the night before. But its pitch had not varied, nor had its sheer, smooth surface. Marten was both relieved and chagrined.

Then, near the western edge of the neck-ridge, he found the chimney.

It was a shallow fissure, perhaps twice the breadth of his body, created probably by a recent seismic disturbance. He remembered, suddenly, the other signs of recent seismic activity he had noticed in the colony, but had not bothered to inquire about. A dozen or so ruptured dwellings were of little consequence when you were on the verge of resolving a complex that had plagued you for twelve years.

The chimney zigzagged upwards as far as he could see, presenting, at least for the first thousand feet, a comparatively easy means of ascent. There were innumerable hand-and footholds, and occasional ledges. The trouble was, he had no way of knowing whether the holds and the ledges—or even the chimney itself—continued all the way to the summit.

He cursed himself for having neglected to bring binocu-

lars. Then he noticed that his hands were trembling, that his heart was tight against his ribs; and he knew, all at once, that he was going to climb the chimney regardless, that nothing could stop him, not even himself; not even the knowledge, had it been available, that the chimney was a dead end.

He drew his piton pistol and inserted one of the dozen clips he carried in his belt. He aimed carefully, squeezed the trigger. The long hours he had spent practicing, while awaiting transportation from the spaceport to the colony, paid off, and the peg, trailing its almost invisible nylon line, imbedded itself in the lofty ledge he had selected for his first belay. The sound of the second charge caromed down and joined the fading sound of the first, and he knew that the steel roots of the peg had been forced deep into the granite, guaranteeing his safety for the initial 500 feet.

He replaced the pistol in its self-locking holster. From now till he reached the ledge, the line would take in its own slack, automatically rewinding itself in the chamber in pace with his ascent.

He began to climb.

His hands were steady now, and his heart had resumed its normal beat. There was a song in him, throbbing soundlessly through his whole being, imbuing him with a strength he had never known before, might never know again. The first 500 feet were almost ridiculously easy. Hand- and foot-holds were so numerous most of the way that it was like climbing a stone ladder, and in the few places where the projections petered out, the walls were ideally spaced for opposite pressure. When he reached the ledge, he wasn't even breathing hard.

He decided not to rest. Sooner or later the thinness of the atmosphere was going to catch up with him, and the higher he got, while he was still fresh, the better. He stood up boldly and drew and aimed the piton pistol. The new peg soared forth, trailing the new line and dislodging the old, arrowing into the base of another ledge some 200 feet above

the one on which he stood. The range of the pistol was 1,000 feet, but the narrowness of the chimney and the awkwardness of his position posed severe limitations.

He resumed his ascent, his confidence increasing with each foot he gained. But he was careful not to look down. The chimney was so far out on the western edge of the neck-ridge that looking down entailed not only the distance he had already climbed, but the 8,000-foot drop from the ridge to the lowlands. He did not think his new confidence quite capable of assimilating the shock of so appalling a height.

The climb to the second ledge was as uneventful as the climb to the first. Again he decided not to rest, and sinking another peg into a third ledge approximately 250 feet above the second, he resumed climbing. Halfway to the third ledge, the first pangs of oxygen starvation manifested themselves in a heaviness in his arms and legs and a shortness of his breath. He slipped an oxygen tablet into his mouth and went on climbing.

The dissolving tablet revived him, and when he reached the third ledge he still did not feel like resting. But he forced himself to sit down on the narrow granite shelf and he laid his head back against the chimney wall and tried to relax. Sunlight smote his eyes and with a shock he realized that the speed of his ascent had been subjective; actually, hours had passed since he had left the neck-ridge, and Alpha Virginis was already at meridian.

Then he couldn't rest, there was no time. He had to reach the face-mesa before nightfall, else he might never reach it at all. In an instant he was on his feet, piton pistol drawn and aimed.

For a while the climb took on a different character. His confidence never diminished and the soundless song throbbed through him in ever-increasing cadence; but the heaviness of his limbs and the shortness of his breath recurred at more and more frequent periods, lending a dream-like quality to the adventure, and this quality, in turn, was interspersed by the

brief but lucid intervals that began immediately whenever he took an oxygen tablet.

The character of the chimney, however, varied only slightly. It grew wider for a while, but he found that by bracing his back against one wall and his feet against the other, he could inch his way upward with a minimum of effort. Then the chimney narrowed again and he returned to his original mode of ascent.

Inevitably he became bolder. Up to now he had been using three-point suspension, never moving one appendage till he was certain the other three were firmly placed. But as his boldness increased, his caution diminished. He neglected three-point suspension more and more often, finally neglected it altogether. After all, he reassured himself, what difference did it make if he did slip? The piton line would stop him before he fell two feet.

And it would have too—if the particular cartridge he had just discharged had not been defective. In his haste he did not notice that the nylon line was not rewinding itself, and when the chockstone, on which he'd just put his entire weight, gave way beneath his foot, his instinctive terror was tempered by the thought that his fall would be brief.

It was not. It was slow at first, unreal. He knew instantly that something had gone wrong. Nearby, someone was screaming. For a moment he did not recognize his own voice. And then the fall was swift; the chimney walls blurred past his clawing hands, and dislodged rubble rained about his anguished face.

Twenty feet down he struck a projection on one side of the chimney. The impact threw him against the other side, then the ledge that he had left a short while before came up jarringly beneath his feet and he sprawled forward on his stomach, the wind knocked from him, blood running into his eyes from a cut on his forehead.

When his breath returned he moved each of his limbs carefully, testing them for broken bones. Then he inhaled

deeply. Afterwards he lay there on his stomach for a long time, content with the knowledge that he was alive and not seriously hurt.

Presently he realized that his eyes were closed. Without thinking, he opened them and wiped the blood away. He found himself staring straight down at the forest of the Virgin's hair, 10,000 feet below. He sucked in his breath, tried to sink his fingers into the ungiving granite of the ledge. For a while he was sick, but gradually his sickness left him and his terror faded away.

The forest spread out almost to the sea, flanked by the magnificent precipices of the neck and shoulder, the nine-mile ridge of the arm. The sea was gold and glittering in the mid-afternoon sunlight, and the lowlands were a green-gold beach—

There was an analogy somewhere. Marten frowned, trying to remember. Hadn't he, a long time ago, crouched on another ledge—or was it a bluff?—looking down upon another beach, a real beach? Looking down at—

Abruptly he remembered, and the memory set his face on fire. He tried to force the unwanted moment back into his subconscious, but it slipped through his mental fingers and came out and stood nakedly in the sun, and he had to confront it whether he wanted to or not, had to live it over again—

After their marriage, he and Lelia had rented the same cottage in Connecticut where *Rise Up, My Love!* was born, and he had settled down to write his second book.

The cottage was a charming affair, perched on a bluff overlooking the sea. Below it, accessible by a flight of winding stairs, was a narrow strip of white sand, protected from the prying eyes of civilization by the wooded arms of a small cove. It was here that Lelia spent her afternoons sunbathing in the nude, while Marten spent those same afternoons feeding empty words and uninspired phrases into the manuscript machine on his study desk.

The new book was going very badly. The spontaneity that had characterized the creation of *Rise Up, My Love!* was no longer with him. Ideas would not come, or, if they did come, he was incapable of coping with them. A part of his mood, he knew, could be ascribed to his marriage. Lelia was everything a bride should be, but there was something she was not, an intangible something that taunted him by night and haunted him by day . . .

The August afternoon had been hot and humid. There was a breeze coming in over the sea, but while it was strong enough to ruffle the curtains of his study window, it wasn't quite strong enough to struggle through the intervening expanse of stagnant air to the doldrums of the study proper where he sat miserably at his desk.

As he sat there, fingering words and phrases, grappling with ideas, he became aware of the soft sound of the surf on the beach below, and an image of Lelia, lying dark and golden in the sun, intruded repeatedly on his thoughts.

Presently he found himself speculating on the positions she might be lying in. On her side, perhaps . . . or perhaps on her back, the golden sunlight raining down on her thighs, her stomach, her breasts . . .

There was a faint throbbing in his temples, a new nervousness in the fingers that toyed with the correction pencil on the desktop before him. Lelia lying immobile by the sea, her dark hair spread out around her head and shoulders, her blue eyes staring up into the sky—

How would she look from above? Say from the height of the bluff? Would she resemble another woman lying by another sea?—a woman who had affected him in some mysterious way and lent him his literary wings?

He wondered, and as he wondered his nervousness grew and the throbbing in his temples thickened and slowed till it matched the rhythmic beat of the surf.

He looked at the clock on the study wall. 2:45. There was very little time. In another half hour she would be coming up to shower. Numbly, he stood up. He walked slowly across

the study, stepped into the living room; he walked across the living room and out upon the latticed porch that fronted the green lawn and the brow of the bluff and the sparkling summer sea.

The grass was soft beneath his feet and there was a dreaminess about the afternoon sunlight and the sound of the surf. When he neared the bluff he got down on his hands and knees, feeling like a fool, and crept cautiously forward. Several feet from the brow, he lowered himself to his elbows and thighs and crawled the rest of the way. He parted the long grass carefully and looked down to the white strip of beach below.

She was lying directly beneath him—on her back. Her left arm was flung out to the sea and her fingers dangled in the water. Her right knee was drawn upward, a graceful hillock of sun-gold flesh . . . and the smooth expanse of her stomach was golden too, as were the gentle mountains of her breasts. Her neck was a magnificent golden ridge leading to the proud precipice of her chin and the vast golden mesa of her face. The blue lakes of her eyes were closed in peaceful sleep.

Illusion and reality intermingled. Time retreated and space ceased to be. At the crucial moment, the blue eyes opened.

She saw him instantly. There was amazement on her face at first, then understanding (though she hadn't understood at all). Finally her lips curved in a beckoning smile and she held out her arms to him. "Come down, darling," she called. "Come down and see me!"

The throbbing in his temples drowned out the sound of the surf as he descended the winding stairs to the beach. She was waiting there by the sea, waiting as she had always waited, waiting for him; and suddenly he was a giant striding over the lowlands, his shoulders brushing the sky, the ground shuddering beneath his Brobdingnagian footsteps.

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, Comely as Jerusalem, Terrible as an army with banners . . .

A breeze, born in the purple shadows between the mountains, wafted up to his eyrie, cooling his flushed face and reviving his battered body. Slowly he got to his feet. He looked up at the enigmatic walls of the chimney, wondering if they continued for the thousand-odd feet that still separated him from the summit.

He drew his piton pistol and ejected the defective cartridge; then he took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. When he replaced the pistol he experienced a wave of giddiness and he reached instinctively for the oxygen packet on his belt. Then he fumbled for the packet, frantically feeling every inch of the web surface, and finally he found the tiny rivets that had remained after the packet had been torn away during his fall.

For a while he did not move. He had but one logical course of action and he knew it: climb back down to the neck-ridge, spend the night there, and return to the colony in the morning; then arrange for transportation to the space-port, take the first ship back to Earth, and forget about the Virgin.

He nearly laughed aloud. Logic was a fine word and an equally fine concept, but there were many things in heaven and earth that it did not encompass, and the Virgin was one of them.

He started to climb.

IV

In the neighborhood of 2,200 feet, the chimney began to change.

Marten did not notice the change at first. Oxygen starvation had decimated his awareness and he moved in a slow continuous lethargy, raising one heavy limb and then an-

other, inching his ponderous body from one precarious position to another equally precarious—but slightly closer to his goal. When he finally did notice, he was too weary to be frightened, too numb to be discouraged.

He had just crawled upon the sanctuary of a narrow ledge and had raised his eyes to seek out another ledge at which to point his pistol. The chimney was palely lit by the last rays of the sinking sun and for a moment he thought that the diminishing light was distorting his vision.

For there were no more ledges—

There was no more chimney either, for that matter. It had been growing wider and wider for some time; now it flared abruptly into a concave slope that stretched all the way to the summit. Strictly speaking, there had never been a chimney in the first place. *In toto*, the fissure was far more suggestive of the cross section of a gigantic funnel: the part he had already climbed represented the tube, and the part he had yet to climb represented the mouth.

The mouth, he saw at a glance, was going to be bad. The slope was far too smooth. From where he sat he could not see a single projection, and while that didn't necessarily rule out the possible existence of projections, it did cancel out the likelihood of there being any large enough to enable him to use his piton pistol. He couldn't very well drive a piton if there was nothing for him to drive it into.

He looked down at his hands. They were trembling again. He started to reach for a cigarette, realized suddenly that he hadn't eaten since morning, and got a supper biscuit out of his pack instead. He ate it slowly, forced it down with a mouthful of water. His canteen was nearly empty. He smiled wanly to himself. At last he had a logical reason for climbing to the mesa; to replenish his water supply in the blue lakes.

He reached for a cigarette again, and this time he pulled one out and lit it. He blew smoke at the darkening sky. He drew his feet up on the ledge and hugged his knees with his arms and rocked himself gently back and forth. He

hummed softly to himself. It was an old, old tune, dating back to his early childhood. Abruptly he remembered where he had heard it and who had sung it to him, and he stood up angrily and flicked his cigarette into the deepening shadows and turned toward the slope.

He resumed his upward journey.

It was a memorable journey. The slope was just as bad as it had looked. It was impossible to ascend it vertically, and he had to traverse, zigzagging back and forth with nothing but finger-thick irregularities to support his weight. But his brief rest and his condensed meal had replenished his strength and at first he experienced no difficulties.

Gradually, however, the increasing thinness of the atmosphere caught up with him again. He moved slower and slower. Sometimes he wondered if he was making any progress at all. He did not dare lean his head back far enough to look upward, for his hand- and footholds were so tenuous that the slightest imbalance could dislodge them. And presently there was the increasing darkness to contend with too.

He regretted not having left his pack on the last ledge. It was an awkward burden and it seemed to grow heavier with each foot he gained. He would have loosened the straps and slipped it from his shoulders—if he had had hands to spare.

Repeatedly, sweat ran down into his eyes. Once he tried to wipe his wet forehead on the granite slope, but he succeeded only in reopening his cut, and the blood joined forces with the sweat and for a while he could not see at all. He began to wonder if the cliff was forever. Finally he managed to wipe his eyes on his sleeve, but still he could not see, for the darkness was complete.

Time blurred, ceased to be. He kept wondering if the stars were out, and when he found a set of hand- and footholds less tenuous than the preceding ones, he leaned his head back carefully and looked upward. But the blood and the sweat ran down into his eyes again and he saw nothing.

He was astonished when his bleeding fingers discovered the ledge. His reconnaissance had been cursory, but even so he had been certain that there were no ledges. But there was this one. Trembling, he inched his weary body higher and higher till at last he found purchase for his elbows, then he swung his right leg onto the granite surface and pulled himself to safety.

It was a wide ledge. He could sense its wideness when he rolled over on his back and let his arms drop to his sides. He lay there quietly, too tired to move. Presently he raised one arm and wiped the blood and sweat from his eyes. The stars were out. The sky was patterned with the pulsing beauty of a hundred constellations. Directly above him was the one he had noticed the night before—the rider with the scythe . . .

Marten sighed. He wanted to lie there on the ledge forever, the starlight soft on his face, the Virgin reassuringly close; lie there in blissful peace, eternally suspended between the past and the future, bereft of time and motion—

But the past would not have it so. Despite his efforts to stop her, Xylla parted its dark curtain and stepped upon the stage. And then the curtain dissolved behind her and the impossible play began.

After the failure of his third novel (the second had sold on the strength of the first and had enjoyed an ephemeral success), Lelia had gone to work for a perfume concern so that he could continue writing. Later on, to free him from the burden of household chores, she had hired a maid.

Xylla was an e.t.—a native of Mizar X. The natives of Mizar X were remarkable for two things: their gigantic bodies and their diminutive minds. Xylla was no exception. She stood over seven feet tall and she had an I.Q. of less than 40.

But for all her height she was well-proportioned, even graceful. In fact, if her face had possessed any appeal at all, she could have passed for an attractive woman. But her

face was flat, with big, bovine eyes and wide cheekbones. Her mouth was much too full, and its fullness was accentuated by a pendulous lower lip. Her hair, which, by contributing the right dash of color, might have rescued her from drabness, was a listless brown.

Marten took one look at her when Lelia introduced them, said "How do you do?" and then dismissed her from his mind. If Lelia thought a giantess could do the housework better than he could, it was all right with him.

That winter Lelia was transferred to the west coast, and rather than suffer the upkeep of two houses, they gave up the Connecticut cottage and moved to California. California was as sparsely populated now as New York. The promised land had long since absconded starward, lay scattered throughout a thousand as yet unexploited systems. But there was one good thing about the average man's eternal hankering for green pastures: the pastures he left behind grew lush in his absence; there was plenty of space for the stay-at-homes and the stubborn; and Earth, after four centuries of opportunism, had finally settled down in its new role as the cultural center of the galaxy.

Lavish twenty-third century villas were scattered all along the California coast. Almost all of them were charming and almost all of them were empty. Lelia chose a pink one, convenient to her work, and settled down into a routine identical, except for a change from the morning to the afternoon shift, to the routine she had left behind; and Marten settled down to write his fourth book.

Or tried to.

He had not been naïve enough to think that a change in scene would snap him out of his literary lethargy. He had known all along that whatever words and combinations thereof that he fed into his manuscript machine had to come from within himself. But he *had* hoped that two failures in a row (the second book was really a failure, despite its short-lived financial success) would goad him to a point where he would not permit a third.

In this he had been wrong. His lethargy not only persisted, it grew worse. He found himself going out less and less often, retiring earlier and earlier to his study and his books. But not to his manuscript machine. He read the great novelists. He read Tolstoy and Flaubert. He read Dostoevski and Stendahl. He read Proust and Cervantes. He read Balzac. And the more he read Balzac, the more his wonder grew, that this small, fat, red-faced man could have been so prolific, while he himself remained as sterile as the white sands on the beach below his study windows.

Around ten o'clock each evening Xylla brought him his brandy in the big snifter glass Lelia had given him on his last birthday, and he would lie back in his lazy-chair before the fireplace (Xylla had built a fire of pine knots earlier in the evening), and sip and dream. Sometimes he would drowse off for a moment, then wake with a start. Finally he would get up, cross the hall to his room, and go to bed.

(Lelia had begun working overtime shortly after their arrival, and seldom got home before one o'clock).

Xylla's effect upon him was cumulative. At first he was not even conscious of it. One night he would notice the way she walked—lightly, for so ponderous a creature, rhythmically, almost; and the next night, the virginal swell of her huge breasts; and the night after that, the graceful surge of her Amazonian thighs beneath her coarse skirt. The night finally came when, on an impulse, or so he thought at the time, he asked her to sit down and talk for a while.

"If you weesh, sar," she said, and sat down on the hassock at his feet.

He hadn't expected that, and at first he was embarrassed. Gradually, however, as the brandy began its swift infiltration of his bloodstream, he warmed to the moment. He noticed the play of the firelight on her hair, and suddenly he was surprised to find that it was something more than a dull brown after all; there was a hint of redness in it, a quiet, unassuming redness that offset the heaviness of her face.

They talked of various things—the weather mostly, some-

times the sea; a book Xylla had read when she was a little girl (the only book she had ever read); Mizar X—When she spoke of Mizar X, something happened to her voice. It grew soft and childlike, and her eyes, which he had thought dull and uninteresting, became bright and round, and he even detected a trace of blueness in them. The merest trace, of course, but it was a beginning.

He began asking her to stay every night after that, and she was always willing, always took her place dutifully on the hassock at his feet. Even sitting, she loomed above him, but he did not find her size disquieting any more, at least not disquieting in the sense that it had been before. Now her vast presence had a lulling effect upon him, lent him a peace of sorts. He began looking forward more and more to her nightly visits.

Lelia continued to work overtime. Sometimes she did not come in till nearly two. He had been concerned about her at first; he had even reprimanded her for working so hard. Somewhere along the line, though, he had stopped being concerned.

Abruptly he remembered the night Lelia had come home early; the night he had touched Xylla's hand . . .

He had been wanting to touch it for a long time. Night after night he had seen it lying motionless on her knee and he had marveled again and again at its symmetry and grace, wondered how much bigger than his hand it was, whether it was soft or coarse, warm or cold. Finally the time came when he couldn't control himself any longer, and he bent forward and reached out—and suddenly her giantess fingers were intertwined with his pygmy ones and he felt the warmth of her and knew her nearness. Her lips were very close, her giantess-face, and her eyes were a vivid blue now, a blue lake blue. And then the coppices of her eyebrows brushed his forehead and the red rimrock of her mouth smothered his and melted into softness and her giantess-arms enfolded him against the twin mountains of her breasts—

Then Lelia, who had paused shocked in the doorway, said: "I'll get my things . . ."

The night was cold, and particles of hoarfrost hovered in the air, catching the light of the stars. Marten shivered, sat up. He looked down into the pale depths below, then he lited his eyes to the breathless beauty of the twin mountains. Presently he stood up and turned toward the slope, instinctively raising his hands in search of new projections.

His hands brushed air.

He stared. There were no projections. There was no slope. There had never been a ledge, for that matter. Before him lay the mesa of the Virgin's face, pale and poignant in the starlight.

V

Marten moved across the mesa slowly. All around him the starlight fell like glistening rain. When he came to the rim-rock of the mouth, he pressed his lips to the cold ungiving stone "Rise up, my love!" he whispered.

But the Virgin remained immobile beneath his feet, as he had known she would, and he went on, past the proud tor of her nose, straining his eyes for the first glimpse of the blue lakes.

He walked numbly, his arms hanging limply at his sides. He hardly knew he walked at all. The lure of the lakes, now that they were so close, was overwhelming. The lovely lakes with their blue beckoning deeps and their promise of eternal delight. No wonder Lelia, and later, Xylla, had palled on him. No wonder none of the other mortal women he had slept with had ever been able to give him what he wanted. No wonder he had come back, after twelve futile years, to his true love.

The Virgin was matchless. There were none like her. None.

He was almost to the cheekbone now, but still no starlit sweep of blue rose up to break the monotony of the mesa.

His eyes ached from strain and expectation. His hands trembled uncontrollably.

And then, suddenly, he found himself standing on the lip of a huge, waterless basin. He stared, dumbfounded. Then he raised his eyes and saw the distant coppice of an eyebrow outlined against the sky. He followed the line of the eyebrow to where it curved inward and became the barren ridge that once had been the gentle isthmus separating the blue lakes—

Before the water had drained away. Before the subterranean pumping system had ceased to function, probably as a result of the same seismic disturbance that had created the chimney.

He had been too impetuous, too eager to possess his true love. It had never occurred to him that she could have changed, that—

No, he would not believe it! Believing meant that the whole nightmarish ascent of the chin-cliff had been for nothing. Believing meant that his whole life was without purpose.

He lowered his eyes, half-expecting, half-hoping to see the blue water welling back into the empty socket. But all he saw was the bleak lake bottom—and its residue—

And such strange residue. Scatterings of gray, stick-like objects, curiously shaped, sometimes joined together. Almost like—like—

Marten shrank back. He wiped his mouth furiously. He turned and began to run.

But he did not run far, not merely because his breath gave out, but because, before he ran any farther, he had to know what he was going to do. Instinctively he had headed for the chin-cliff. But would becoming a heap of broken bones on the neck-ridge be any different, basically, from drowning in one of the lakes?

He paused in the starlight, sank to his knees. Revulsion shook him. How could he have been so naïve, even when he was twenty, as to believe that he was the only one? Cer-

tainly he was the only Earthman—but the Virgin was an old, old woman, and in her youth she had had many suitors, conquering her by whatever various means they could devise, and symbolically dying in the blue deeps of her eyes.

Their very bones attested to her popularity.

What did you do when you learned that your goddess had feet of clay? What did you do when you discovered that your true love was a whore?

Marten wiped his mouth again. There was one thing that you did *not* do—

You did not sleep with her . . .

Dawn was a pale promise in the east. The stars had begun to fade. Marten stood on the edge of the chin-cliff, waiting for the day.

He remembered a man who had climbed a mountain centuries ago, and buried a chocolate bar on the summit. A ritual of some kind, meaningless to the uninitiated. Standing there on the mesa, Marten buried several items of his own. He buried his boyhood and he buried *Rise Up, My Love!* He buried the villa in California and he buried the cottage in Connecticut. Last of all—with regret, but with finality—he buried his mother.

He waited till the false morning had passed, till the first golden fingers of the sun reached out and touched his tired face. Then he started down.

C. M. KORNBLUTH

Cecil Corwin was once a prolific and brilliant writer of science fiction. You'll find forty-three entries, under his own name and his many pseudonyms, in Donald Day's INDEX TO THE SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINES, 1926-1950; he has appeared in F&SF (The Mask of Demeter, January, 1953) and he once received a Jules Verne Award. If you're wondering why you have not seen Mr. Corwin's name in print recently, you'll find the answer (along with at least part of The Answer) in one of the oddest stories ever to turn up on even this editorial desk.

MS. FOUND IN A CHINESE FORTUNE COOKIE

THEY SAY I am mad, but I am not mad—damn it, I've written and sold two million words of fiction and I know better than to start a story like that, but this isn't a story and they do say I'm mad—catatonic schizophrenia with assaultive episodes—and I'm not. (This is clearly the first of the Corwin Papers. Like all the others it is written on a Riz-La cigarette paper with a ball point pen. Like all the others it is headed: Urgent. Finder please send to C. M. Kornbluth, Wantagh, N.Y. Reward! I might comment that this is typical of Corwin's generosity with his friends' time and money, though his attitude is at least this once justified by his desperate plight. As his longtime friend and, indeed, literary executor, I was clearly the person to turn

to. CMK) I have to convince you, Cyril, that I am both sane and the victim of an enormous conspiracy—and that you are too, and that everybody is. A tall order, but I am going to try to fill it by writing an orderly account of the events leading up to my present situation. *(Here ends the first paper. To keep the record clear I should state that it was forwarded to me by a Mr. L. Wilmot Shaw, who found it in a fortune cookie he ordered for dessert at the Great China Republic Restaurant in San Francisco. Mr. Shaw suspected it was “a publicity gag” but sent it to me nonetheless, and received by return mail my thanks and my check for one dollar. I had not realized that Corwin and his wife had disappeared from their home at Painted Post; I was merely aware that it had been weeks since I’d heard from him. We visited infrequently. To be blunt, he was easier to take via mail than face to face. For the balance of this account I shall attempt to avoid tedium by omitting the provenance of each paper, except when noteworthy, and its length. The first is typical—a little over a hundred words. I have, of course, kept on file all correspondence relating to the papers, and am eager to display it to the authorities. It is hoped that publication of this account will nudge them out of the apathy with which they have so far greeted my attempts to engage them. CMK)*

On Sunday, May 13, 1956, at about 12:30 P.M., I learned The Answer. I was stiff and aching because all Saturday my wife and I had been putting in young fruit trees. I like to dig, but I was badly out of condition from an unusually long and idle winter. Creatively, I felt fine. I’d been stale for months, but when spring came the sap began to run in me too. I was bursting with story ideas; scenes and stretches of dialog were jostling one another in my mind; all I had to do was let them flow onto paper.

When The Answer popped into my head I thought at first it was an idea for a story—a very good story. I was going to go downstairs and bounce it off my wife a few times to test it, but I heard the sewing machine buzzing and remem-

bered she had said she was 'way behind on her mending. Instead, I put my feet up, stared blankly through the window at the pasture-and-wooded-hills View we'd bought the old place for, and fondled the idea.

What about, I thought, using the idea to develop a messy little local situation, the case of Mrs. Clonford? Mrs. C. is a neighbor, animal-happy, land-poor and unintentionally a fearsome oppressor of her husband and children. Mr. C. is a retired brakeman with a pension and his wife insists on him making like a farmer in all weathers and every year he gets pneumonia and is pulled through with antibiotics. All he wants is to sell the damned farm and retire with his wife to a little apartment in town. All *she* wants is to mess around with her cows and horses and sub-marginal acreage.

I got to thinking that if you noised the story around *with* a comment based on The Answer, the situation would automatically untangle. They'd get their apartment, sell the farm and everybody would be happy, including Mrs. C. It would be interesting to write, I thought idly, and then I thought not so idly that it would be interesting to *try*—and then I sat up sharply with a dry mouth and a systemful of adrenalin. *It would work.* The Answer would work.

I ran rapidly down a list of other problems, ranging from the town drunk to the guided-missile race. The Answer worked. Every time.

I was quite sure I had turned paranoid, because I've seen so much of that kind of thing in science fiction. Anybody can name a dozen writers, editors and fans who have suddenly seen the light and determined to lead the human race onward and upward out of the old slough. Of course The Answer looked logical and unassailable, but so no doubt did poor Charlie McGandress' project to unite mankind through science fiction fandom, at least to him. So, no doubt, did (*I have here omitted several briefly sketched case histories of science fiction personalities as yet uncommitted. The reason will be obvious to anyone familiar with the law of*

libel. Suffice it to say that Corwin argues that science fiction attracts an unstable type of mind and sometimes insidiously undermines its foundations on reality. CMK)

But I couldn't just throw it away without a test. I considered the wording carefully, picked up the extension phone on my desk and dialed Jim Howlett, the appliance dealer in town. He answered. "Corwin, Jim," I told him. "I have an idea—oops! The samovar's boiling over. Call me back in a minute, will you?" I hung up.

He called me back in a minute; I let our combination—two shorts and a long—ring three times before I picked up the phone. "What was that about a samovar?" he asked, baffled.

"Just kidding," I said. "Listen, Jim, why don't you try a short story for a change of pace? Knock off the novel for a while—" He's hopefully writing a big historical about the Sullivan Campaign of 1779, which is our local chunk of the Revolutionary War; I'm helping him a little with advice. Anybody who wants as badly as he does to get out of the appliance business is entitled to some help.

"Gee, I don't know," he said. As he spoke the volume of his voice dropped slightly but definitely, three times. That meant we had an average quota of party-line snoopers listening in. "What would I write about?"

"Well, we have this situation with a neighbor, Mrs. Clonford," I began. I went through the problem and made my comment based on the Answer. I heard one of the snoopers gasp. Jim said when I was finished: "I don't really think it's for me, Cecil. Of course it was nice of you to call, but—"

Eventually a customer came into the store and he had to break off.

I went through an anxious crabby twenty-four hours.

On Monday afternoon the paper woman drove past our place and shot the rolled-up copy of the Pott Hill *Evening Times* into the orange-painted tube beside our mailbox. I raced for it, yanked it open to the seventh page and read:

"FARM SALE

Owing to Ill Health and Age
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Clonford
Will sell their Entire Farm, All
Machinery and Furnishings and
All Live Stock at Auction Sat-
urday May 19 12:30 P.M. Rain
or Shine, Terms Cash Day of
Sale, George Pfennig,
Auctioneer."

(This is one of the few things in the Corwin Papers which can be independently verified. I looked up the paper and found that the ad was run about as quoted. Further, I interviewed Mrs. Clonford in her town apartment. She told me she "just got tired of farmin', I guess. Kind of hated to give up my ponies, but people was beginning to say it was too hard of a life for Ronnie and I guess they was right." CMK)

Coincidence? Perhaps. I went upstairs with the paper and put my feet up again. I could try a hundred more piddling tests if I wished, but why waste time? If there was anything to it, I could type out The Answer in about two hundred words, drive to town, tack it on the bulletin board outside the firehouse and—snowball. Avalanchel

I didn't do it, of course—for the same reason I haven't put down the two hundred words of The Answer yet on a couple of these cigarette papers. It's rather dreadful—isn't it—that I haven't done so, that a simple feasible plan to ensure peace, progress and equality of opportunity among all mankind may be lost to the world if, say, a big meteorite hits the asylum in the next couple of minutes. But—I'm a writer. There's a touch of intellectual sadism in us. We like to dominate the reader as a matador dominates the bull; we like to tease and mystify and at last show what great souls we are by generously flipping up the shade and letting the

sunshine in. Don't worry. Read on. You will come to The Answer in the proper artistic place for it. *(At this point I wish fervently to dissociate myself from the attitudes Corwin attributes to our profession. He had—has, I hope—his eccentricities, and I consider it inexcusable of him to tar us all with his personal brush. I could point out, for example, that he once laboriously cultivated a Sixteenth Century handwriting which was utterly illegible to the modern reader. The only reason apparent for this, as for so many of his traits, seemed to be a wish to annoy as many people as possible. CMK)*

Yes; I am a writer. A matador does not show up in the bull ring with a tommy gun and a writer doesn't do things the simple, direct way. He makes the people writhe a little first. So I called Fred Greenwald. Fred had been after me for a while to speak at one of the Thursday Rotary meetings and I'd been reluctant to set a date. I have a little speech for such occasions, "The Business of Being a Writer"—all about the archaic royalty system of payment, the difficulty of proving business expenses, the Margaret Mitchell tax law and how it badly needs improvement, what copyright is and isn't, how about all these generals and politicians with their capital-gains memoirs. I pass a few galley sheets down the table and generally get a good laugh by holding up a Doubleday book contract, silently turning it over so they can see how the fine print goes on and on, and then flipping it open so they see there's twice as much fine print as they thought there was. I had done my stuff for Oswego Rotary, Horseheads Rotary and Cannon Hole Rotary; now Fred wanted me to do it for Painted Post Rotary.

So I phoned him and said I'd be willing to speak this coming Thursday. "Good," he said. On a discovery I'd made about the philosophy and technique of administration and interpersonal relationships, I said. He sort of choked up and said, "Well, we're broad-minded here."

I've got to start cutting this. I have several packs of cigarette papers left but not enough to cover the high spots if

I'm to do them justice. Let's just say the announcement of my speech was run in the Tuesday paper (*It was. CMK*) and skip to Wednesday, my place, about 7:30 p.m. Dinner was just over and my wife and I were going to walk out and see how (*At this point I wish to insert a special note concerning some difficulty I had in obtaining the next four papers. They got somehow into the hands of a certain literary agent who is famous for a sort of "finders-keepers" attitude more appropriate to the eighth grade than to the law of literary property. In disregard of the fact that Corwin retained ownership of the papers and literary rights thereto, and that I as the addressee possessed all other rights, he was blandly endeavoring to sell them to various magazines as "curious fragments from Corwin's desk." Like most people, I abhor lawsuits; that's the fact this agent lives on. I met his outrageous price of five cents a word "plus postage (!)." I should add that I have not heard of any attempt by this gentleman to locate Corwin or his heirs in order to turn over the proceeds of the sale, less commission. CMK*) the new fruit trees were doing when a car came bumping down our road and stopped at our garden fence gate.

"See what they want and shove them on their way," said my wife. "We haven't got much daylight left." She peered through the kitchen window at the car, blinked, rubbed her eyes and peered again. She said uncertainly: "It looks like—no! Can't be." I went out to the car.

"Anything I can do for you?" I asked the two men in the front seat. Then I recognized them. One of them was about my age, a wiry lad in a T-shirt. The other man was plump and graying and ministerial, but jolly. They were unmistakable; they had looked out at me—one scowling, the other smiling—from a hundred book ads. It was almost incredible that they knew each other, but there they were sharing a car.

I greeted them by name and said: "This is odd. I happen to be a writer myself. I've never shared the best-seller list with you two, but—"

The plump ministerial man tut-tutted. "You are thinking negatively," he chided me. "Think of what you *have* accomplished. You own this lovely home, the valuation of which has just been raised two thousand dollars due entirely to the hard work and frugality of you and your lovely wife; you give innocent pleasure to thousands with your clever novels; you help to keep the good local merchants going with your patronage. Not least, you have fought for your country in the wars and you support it with your taxes."

The man in the T-shirt said raspily: "Even if you don't have the dough to settle in full on April 15 and will have to pay six per cent per month interest on the unpaid balance when and if you ever do pay it, you poor shnook."

The plump man said, distressed: "Please, Michael—you are not thinking positively. This is neither the time nor the place—"

"What's going on?" I demanded. Because I hadn't even told my *wife* I'd been a little short on the '55 federal tax.

"Let's go inna house," said the T-shirted man. He got out of the car, brushed my gate open and walked coolly down the path to the kitchen door. The plump man followed, sniffing our rose-scented garden air appreciatively, and I came last of all, on wobbly legs.

When we filed in my wife said: "My God. It *is* them."

The man in the T-shirt said: "Hiya, babe," and stared at her breasts. The plump man said: "May I compliment you, my dear, for a splendid rose garden. Quite unusual for this altitude."

"Thanks," she said faintly, beginning to rally. "But it's quite easy when your neighbors keep horses."

"Haw!" snorted the man in the T-shirt. "That's the stuff, babe. You grow roses like I write books. Give 'em plenty of—"

"Michael!" said the plump man.

"Look, you," my wife said to me. "Would you mind telling me what this is all about? I never knew you knew Dr.—"

"I don't," I said helplessly. "They seem to want to talk to me."

"Let us adjourn to your *sanctum sanctorum*," said the plump man archly, and we went upstairs. The T-shirted man sat on the couch, the plump fellow sat in the club chair and I collapsed on the swivel chair in front of the typewriter. "Drink, anybody?" I asked, wanting one myself. "Sherry, brandy, rye, straight angostura?"

"Never touch the stinking stuff," grunted the man in the T-shirt.

"I would enjoy a nip of brandy," said the big man. We each had one straight, no chasers, and he got down to business with: "I suppose you have discovered The Diagonal Relationship?"

I thought about The Answer, and decided that The Diagonal Relationship would be a very good name for it too. "Yes," I said. "I guess I have. Have you?"

"I have. So has Michael here. So have one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four writers. If you'd like to know who they are, pick the one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four top-income men of the ten thousand free-lance writers in this country and you have your men. The Diagonal Relationship is discovered on an average of three times a year by rising writers."

"Writers," I said. "Good God, why *writers*? Why not economists, psychologists, mathematicians—*real* thinkers?"

He said: "A writer's mind is an awesome thing, Corwin. What went into your discovery of The Diagonal Relationship?"

I thought a bit. "I'm doing a Civil War thing about Burnside's Bomb," I said, "and I realized that Grant could have sent in fresh troops but didn't because Halleck used to drive him crazy by telegraphic masterminding of his campaigns. That's a special case of The Answer—as I call it. Then I got some data on medieval attitudes toward personal astrology out of a book on ancient China I'm reading. Another special case. And there's a joke the monks used to

write at the end of a long manuscript-copying job. Liddell Hart's theory of strategy is about half of the general military case of *The Answer*. The merchandising special case shows clearly in a catalog I have from a Chicago store that specializes in selling strange clothes to bop-crazed Negroes. They all add up to the general expression, and that's that."

He was nodding. "Many, many combinations add up to *The Diagonal Relationship*," he said. "But only a writer cuts across sufficient fields, exposes himself to sufficient apparently unrelated facts. Only a writer has wide-open associational channels capable of bridging the gap between astrology and, ah, 'bop.' We write in our different idioms"—he smiled at the T-shirted man—"but we are writers all. Wide-ranging, omnivorous for data, equipped with superior powers of association, which we constantly exercise."

"Well," I asked logically enough, "why on earth haven't you published *The Diagonal Relationship*? Are you here to keep me from publishing it?"

"We're a power group," said the plump man apologetically. "We have a vested interest in things as they are. Think about what *The Diagonal Relationship* would do to writers, Corwin."

"Sure," I said, and thought about it. "Judas Priest!" I said after a couple of minutes. He was nodding again. He said: "Yes. *The Diagonal Relationship*, if generally promulgated, would work out to approximate equality of income for all, with incentive pay only for really hard and dangerous work. Writing would be regarded as pretty much its own reward."

"That's the way it looks," I said. "One-year copyright, after all . . ."

(Here occurs the first hiatus in the Corwin Papers. I suspect that three or four are missing. The preceding and following papers, incidentally, come from a batch of six gross of fortune cookies which I purchased from the Hip Sing Restaurant Provision Company of New York City during the course of my investigations. The reader no doubt will wonder why I was unable to determine the source of the cookies

themselves and was forced to buy them from middlemen. Apparently the reason is the fantastic one that by chance I was wearing a white shirt, dark tie and double-breasted blue serge suit when I attempted to question the proprietor of the Hip Sing Company. I learned too late that this is just about the unofficial uniform of U. S. Treasury and Justice Department agents and that I was immediately taken to be such an agent. "You T-man," said Mr. Hip tolerantly, "you get cou't oh-dah, I show you books. Keep ve'y nice books, all in Chinese cha'ctahs." After that gambit he would answer me only in Chinese. How he did it I have no idea, but apparently within days every Chinese produce dealer in the United States and Canada had been notified that there was a new T-man named Kornbluth on the prowl. As a last resort I called on the New York City office of the Treasury Department Field Investigations Unit in an attempt to obtain what might be called un-identification papers. There I was assured by Mr. Gershon O'Brien, their Chinese specialist, that my errand was hopeless since the motto of Mr. Hip and his colleagues invariably was "Safety First." To make matters worse, as I left his office I was greeted with a polite smile from a Chinese lad whom I recognized as Mr. Hip's bookkeeper. CMK)

"So you see," he went on as if he had just stated a major and a minor premise, "we watch the writers, the real ones, through private detective agencies, which alert us when the first teaser appears in a newspaper or on a broadcast or in local gossip. There's always the teaser, Corwin, the rattle before the strike. We writers are like that. We've been watching you for three years now, and to be perfectly frank I've lost a few dollars wagered on you. In my opinion you're a year late."

"What's the proposition?" I asked numbly.

He shrugged. "You get to be a best-seller. We review your books, you review ours. We tell your publisher: 'Corwin's hot—promote him. Advertise him.' And he does, because we're good properties and he doesn't want to annoy

us. You want Hollywood? it can be arranged. Lots of us out there. In short, you become rich like us and all you have to do is keep quiet about The Diagonal Relationship. You haven't told your wife, by the way?"

"I wanted to surprise her," I said.

He smiled. "They always do. Writers! Well, young man, what do you say?"

It had grown dark. From the couch came a raspy voice: "You heard what the doc said about the ones that throw in with us. I'm here to tell you that we got provisions for the ones that don't."

I laughed at him.

"One of those guys," he said flatly.

"Surely a borderline case, Michael?" said the plump man. "So many of them are."

If I'd been thinking straight I would have realized that "borderline case" did not mean "undecided" to them; it meant "danger—immediate action!"

They took it. The plump man, who was also a fairly big man, flung his arms around me and the wiry one approached in the gloom. I yelled something when I felt a hypodermic stab my arm. Then I went numb and stupid.

My wife came running up the stairs. "What's going on?" she demanded. I saw her heading for the curtain behind which we keep an aged hair-trigger Marlin .38 rifle. There was nothing wrong with her guts, but they attacked her where courage doesn't count. I croaked her name a couple of times and heard the plump man say gently, with great concern: "I'm afraid your husband needs . . . help." She turned from the curtain, her eyes wide. He had struck subtly and knowingly; there is probably not one writer's wife who does not suspect her husband is a potential psychotic.

"Dear—" she said to me as I stood there paralyzed.

He went on: "Michael and I dropped in because we both admire your husband's work; we were surprised and distressed to find his conversation so . . . disconnected. My

dear, as you must know, I have some experience through my pastorate with psychotherapy. Have you ever—forgive my bluntness—had doubts about his sanity?”

“Dear, what’s the matter?” she asked me anxiously. I just stood there, staring. God knows what they injected me with, but its effect was to cloud my mind, render all activity impossible, send my thoughts spinning after their tails. I was insane. (*This incident, seemingly the least plausible part of Corwin’s story, actually stands up better than most of the narrative to one familiar with recent advances in biochemistry. Corwin could have been injected with lysergic acid, or with protein extracts from the blood of psychotics. It is a matter of cold laboratory fact that such injections produce temporary psychosis in the patient. Indeed, it is on such experimental psychoses that the new tranquilizer drugs are developed and tested. CMK*)

To herself she said aloud, dully: “Well, it’s finally come. Christmas when I burned the turkey and he wouldn’t speak to me for a week. The way he drummed his fingers when I talked. All his little crackpot ways—how he has to stay at the Waldorf but I have to cut his hair and save a dollar. I hoped it was just the rotten weather and cabin fever. I hoped when spring came—” She began to sob. The plump man comforted her like a father. I just stood there staring and waiting. And eventually Mickey glided up in the dark and gave her a needleful too and

(*Here occurs an aggravating and important hiatus. One can only guess that Corwin and his wife were loaded into the car, driven—Somewhere, separated, and separately, under false names, committed to different mental institutions. I have recently learned to my dismay that there are states which require only the barest sort of licensing to operate such institutions. One State Inspector of Hospitals even wrote to me in these words “. . . no doubt there are some places in our State which are not even licensed, but we have never made any effort to close them and I cannot recall any statute making such operation illegal. We are not a*

wealthy state like you up North and some care for these unfortunates is better than none, is our viewpoint here. . . . CMK)

three months. Their injections last a week. There's always somebody to give me another. You know what mental hospital attendants are like: an easy bribe. But they'd be better advised to bribe a higher type, like a male nurse, because my attendant with the special needle for me is off on a drunk. My insanity wore off this morning and I've been writing in my room ever since. A quick trip up and down the corridor collected the cigarette papers and a tiny ball point pen from some breakfast-food premium gadget. I think my best bet is to slip these papers out in the batch of Chinese fortune cookies they're doing in the bakery. Occupational therapy, this is called. My own o.t. is shoveling coal when I'm under the needle. Well, enough of this. I shall write down *The Answer*, slip down to the bakery, deal out the cigarette papers into the waiting rounds of cookie dough, crimp them over and return to my room. Doubtless my attendant will be back by then and I'll get another shot from him. I shall not struggle; I can only wait. THE ANSWER: HUMAN BEINGS RAISED TO SPEAK AN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE SUCH AS ENGLISH HAVE THE FOLLOWING IN

(That is the end of the last of the Corwin Papers I have been able to locate. It should be superfluous to urge all readers to examine carefully any fortune cookie slips they may encounter. The next one you break open may contain what my poor friend believed, or believes, to be a great message to mankind. He may be right. His tale is a wild one but it is consistent. And it embodies the only reasonable explanation I have ever seen for the presence of certain books on the best-seller list. CMK)

POUL ANDERSON

Unlikely though it may seem after the over-emphasis on telepathy in recent science fiction, there is still something new to be said on the subject; and Poul Anderson says it pointedly in a story at once tender and tough-minded.

JOURNEY'S END

—doctor bill & twinges in chest but must be all right maybe indigestion & dinner last night & wasn't audrey giving me the glad eye & how the hell is a guy to know & maybe i can try and find out & what a fool i can look if she doesn't—

—goddam idiot & they shouldn't let some people drive & oh all right so the examiner was pretty lenient with me i haven't had a bad accident yet & christ blood all over my blood let's face it i'm scared to drive but the buses are no damn good & straight up three paces & man in a green hat & judas i ran that red light—

In fifteen years a man got used to it, more or less. He could walk down the street and hold his own thoughts to himself while the surf of unvoiced voices was a nearly ignored mumble in his brain. Now and then, of course, you got something very bad, it stood up in your skull and shrieked at you.

Norman Kane, who had come here because he was in love with a girl he had never seen, got to the corner of University

and Shattuck just when the light turned against him. He paused, fetching out a cigaret with nicotine-yellowed fingers while traffic slithered in front of his eyes.

It was an unfavorable time, four-thirty in the afternoon, homeward rush of nervous systems jangled with weariness and hating everything else on feet or wheels. Maybe he should have stayed in the bar down on San Pablo. It had been pleasantly cool and dim, the bartender's mind an amiable cud-chewing somnolence, and he could have suppressed awareness of the woman.

No, maybe not. When the city had scraped your nerves raw, they didn't have much resistance to the slime in some heads.

Odd, he reflected, how often the outwardly polite ones were the foully twisted inside. They wouldn't dream of misbehaving in public, but just below the surface of consciousness . . . Better not think of it, better not remember. Berkeley was at least preferable to San Francisco or Oakland. The bigger the town, the more evil it seemed to hold, three centimeters under the frontal bone. New York was almost literally uninhabitable.

There was a young fellow waiting beside Kane. A girl came down the sidewalk, pretty, long yellow hair and a well-filled blouse. Kane focused idly on her: yes, she had an apartment of her own, which she had carefully picked for a tolerant superintendent. Lechery jumped in the young man's nerves. His eyes followed the girl, Cobean-style, and she walked on . . . simple harmonic motion.

Too bad. They could have enjoyed each other. Kane chuckled to himself. He had nothing against honest lust, anyhow not in his liberated conscious mind; he couldn't do much about a degree of subconscious puritanism. Lord, you can't be a telepath and remain any kind of prude. People's lives were their own business, if they didn't hurt anyone else too badly.

—the trouble is, he thought, they hurt me. but i can't tell them that. they'd rip me apart and dance on the pieces.

the government /the military/ wouldn't like a man to be alive who could read secrets but their fear-inspired anger would be like a baby's tantrum beside the red blind amok of the common man (thoughtful husband considerate father good honest worker earnest patriot) whose inward sins were known. you can talk to a priest or a psychiatrist because it is only talk & and he does not live your failings with you—

The light changed and Kane started across. It was clear fall weather, not that this area had marked seasons, a cool sunny day with a small wind blowing up the street from the water. A few blocks ahead of him, the University campus was a splash of manicured green under brown hills.
—flayed & burningburningburning moldering rotted flesh & the bones the white hard clean bones coming out gwtjklfmx—

Kane stoped dead. Through the vertigo he felt how sweat was drenching into his shirt.

And it was such an ordinary-looking man!

"Hey, there, buster, wake up! Ya wanna get killed?"

Kane took a sharp hold on himself and finished the walk across the street. There was a bench at the bus stop and he sat down till the trembling was over.

Some thoughts were unendurable.

He had a trick of recovery. He went back to Father Schliemann. The priest's mind had been like a well, a deep well under sun-speckled trees, its surface brightened with a few gold-colored autumn leaves . . . but there was nothing bland about the water, it had a sharp mineral tang, a smell of the living earth. He had often fled to Father Schliemann, in those days of puberty when the telepathic power had first wakened in him. He had found good minds since then, happy minds, but never one so serene, none with so much strength under the gentleness.

"I don't want you hanging around that papist, boy, do you understand?" It was his father, the lean implacable man

who always wore a black tie. "Next thing you know, you'll be worshiping graven images just like him."

"But they *aren't*—"

His ears could still ring with the cuff. "Go up to your room! I don't want to see you till tomorrow morning. And you'll have two more chapters of Deuteronomy memorized by then. Maybe that'll teach you the true Christian faith."

Kane grinned wryly and lit another cigaret from the end of the previous one. He knew he smoked too much. And drank—but not heavily. Drunk, he was defenseless before the horrible tides of thinking.

He had had to run away from home at the age of fourteen. The only other possibility was conflict ending with reform school. It had meant running away from Father Schliemann too, but how in hell's red fire could a sensitive adolescent dwell in the same house as his father's brain? Were the psychologists now admitting the possibility of a sadistic masochist? Kane *knew* the type existed.

Give thanks for this much mercy, that the extreme telepathic range was only a few hundred yards. And a mind-reading boy was not altogether helpless; he could evade officialdom and the worst horrors of the underworld. He could find a decent elderly couple at the far end of the continent and talk himself into adoption.

Kane shook himself and got up again. He threw the cigaret to the ground and stubbed it out with his heel. A thousand examples told him what obscure sexual symbolism was involved in that act, but what the deuce . . . it was also a practical thing. Guns are phallic too, but at times you need a gun.

Weapons: he could not help wincing as he recalled dodging the draft in 1949. He'd traveled enough to know this country was worth defending. But it hadn't been any trick at all to hoodwink a psychiatrist and get himself marked hopelessly psychoneurotic—which he would be after two years penned with frustrated men. There had been no choice, but he could not escape a sense of dishonor.

—haven't we all sinned / every one of us/ is there a single human creature on earth without his burden of shame?—

A man was coming out of the drugstore beside him. Idly, Kane probed his mind. You could go quite deeply into anyone's self if you cared to, in fact you couldn't help doing so. It was impossible merely to scan verbalized thinking: the organism is too closely integrated. Memory is not a passive filing cabinet, but a continuous process beneath the level of consciousness; in a way, you are always reliving your entire past. And the more emotionally charged the recollection is, the more powerfully it radiates.

The stranger's name was—no matter. His personality was as much an unchangeable signature as his fingerprints. Kane had gotten into the habit of thinking of people as such-and-such a multidimensional symbolic topography; the name was an arbitrary gabble.

The man was an assistant professor of English at the University. Age forty-two, married, three children, making payments on a house in Albany. Steady sober type, but convivial, popular with his colleagues, ready to help out most friends. He was thinking about tomorrow's lectures, with overtones of a movie he wanted to see and an undercurrent of fear that he might have cancer after all, in spite of what the doctor said.

Below, the list of his hidden crimes. As a boy: tormenting a cat, well-buried Oedipean hungers, masturbation, petty theft . . . the usual. Later: cheating on a few exams, that ludicrous fumbling attempt with a girl which came to nothing because he was too nervous, the time he crashed a cafeteria line and had been shoved away with a cold remark (and praises be, Jim who had seen that was now living in Chicago) . . . still later: wincing memories of a stomach uncontrollably rumbling at a formal dinner, that woman in his hotel room the night he got drunk at the convention, standing by and letting old Carver be fired because he didn't have the courage to protest to the dean . . . now: youngest child a nasty whining little snotnose, but you can't show

anyone what you really think, reading Rosamond Marshall when alone in his office, disturbing young breasts in tight sweaters, the petty spite of academic politics, giving Simonson an undeserved good grade because they boy was so beautiful, disgraceful sweating panic when at night he considered how death would annihilate his ego—

And what of it? This assistant professor was a good man, a kindly and honest man, his inwardness ought to be between him and the Recording Angel. Few of his thoughts had ever become deeds, or ever would. Let him bury them himself, let him be alone with them. Kane ceased focusing on him.

The telepath had grown tolerant. He expected little of anyone; nobody matched the mask, except possibly Father Schliemann and a few others . . . and those were human too, with human failings; the difference was that they knew peace. It was the emotional overtones of guilt which made Kane wince. God knew he himself was no better. Worse, maybe, but then his life had thrust him to it. If you had an ordinary human sex drive, for instance, but could not endure to cohabit with the thoughts of a woman, your life became one of fleeting encounters; there was no help for it, even if your austere boyhood training still protested.

"Pardon me, got a match?"

—lynn is dead/ i still can't understand it that i will never see her again & eventually you learn how to go on in a chopped-off fashion but what do you do in the meantime how do you get through the nights alone—

"Sure." *—maybe that is the worst: sharing sorrow and unable to help & only able to give him a light for his cigaret—*

Kane put the matches back in his pocket and went on up University, pausing again at Oxford. A pair of large campus buildings jutted up to the left; others were visible ahead and to the right, through a screen of eucalyptus trees. Sunlight and shadow damascened the grass. From a passing student's mind he discovered where the library was. A good

big library—perhaps it held a clue, buried somewhere in the periodical files. He had already arranged for permission to use the facilities: prominent young author doing research for his next novel.

Crossing wistfully named Oxford Street, Kane smiled to himself. Writing was really the only possible occupation: he could live in the country and be remote from the jammed urgency of his fellow men. And with such an understanding of the soul as was his, with any five minutes on a corner giving him a dozen stories, he made good money at it. The only drawback was the trouble of avoiding publicity, editorial summonses to New York, autographing parties, literary teas . . . he didn't like those. But you could remain faceless if you insisted.

They said nobody but his agent knew who B. Traven was. It had occurred, wildly, to Kane that Traven might be another like himself. He had gone on a long journey to find out. . . . No. He was alone on earth, a singular and solitary mutant, except for—

It shivered in him, again he sat on the train. It had been three years ago, he was in the club car having a nightcap while the streamliner ran eastward through the Wyoming darkness. They passed a westbound train, not so elegant a one. His drink leaped from his hand to the floor and he sat for a moment in stinging blindness. That flicker of thought, brushing his mind and coming aflame with recognition and then borne away again . . . Damn it, damn it, he should have pulled the emergency cord and so should *she*. There should have halted both trains and stumbled through cinders and sagebrush and found each other's arms.

Too late. Three years yielded only a further emptiness. Somewhere in the land there was, or there had been, a young woman, and she was a telepath and the startled touch of her mind had been gentle. There had not been time to learn anything else. Since then he had given up on private detectives. (How could you tell them: "I'm looking for a girl who was on such-and-such a train the night of—"?) Per-

sonal ads in all the major papers had brought him nothing but a few crank letters. Probably she didn't read the personals; he'd never done so till his search began, there was too much unhappiness to be found in them if you understood humankind as well as he did.

Maybe this library here, some unnoticed item . . . but if there are two points in a finite space and one moves about so as to pass through every infinitesimal volume dV , it will encounter the other one in finite time *provided* that the other point is not moving too.

Kane shrugged and went along the curving way to the gatehouse. It was slightly uphill. There was a bored cop in the shelter, to make sure that only authorized cars were parked on campus. The progress paradox: a ton or so of steel, burning irreplaceable petroleum to shift one or two human bodies around, and doing the job so well that it becomes universal and chokes the cities which spawned it. A telepathic society would be more rational. When every little wound in the child's soul could be felt and healed . . . when the thick burden of guilt was laid down, because everyone knew that everyone else had done the same . . . when men could not kill, because soldier and murderer felt the victim die . . .

—adam & eve? you can't breed a healthy race out of two people. but if we had telepathic children/ & we would be bound to do so i think because the mutation is obviously recessive/ then we could study the heredity of it & the gift would be passed on to other blood-lines in logical distribution & every generation there would be more of our kind until we could come out openly & even the mindmutes could be helped by our psychiatrists & priests & earth would be fair and clean and sane—

There were students sitting on the grass, walking under the Portland Cement Romanesque of the buildings, calling and laughing and talking. The day was near an end. Now there would be dinner, a date, a show, maybe some beer at Robbie's or a drive up into the hills to neck and watch

the lights below like trapped stars and the mighty constellation of the Bay Bridge . . . or perhaps, with a face-saving grumble about mid-terms, an evening of books, a world suddenly opened. It must be good to be young and mindmute. A dog trotted down the walk and Kane relaxed into the simple wordless pleasure of being a healthy and admired collie.

—so perhaps it is better to be a dog than a man? no /surely not/ for if a man knows more grief he also knows more joy & so it is to be a telepath: more easily hurt yes but /god/ think of the mindmutes always locked away in aloneness and think of sharing not only a kiss but a soul with your beloved—

The uphill trend grew steeper as he approached the library, but Kane was in fair shape and rather enjoyed the extra effort. At the foot of the stairs he paused for a quick cigaret before entering. A passing woman flicked eyes across him and he learned that he could also smoke in the lobby. Mind reading had its everyday uses. But it was good to stand here in the sunlight. He stretched, reaching out physically and mentally.

—let's see now the integral of $\log x \, dx$ well make a substitution suppose we call y equal to $\log x$ then this is interesting i wonder who wrote that line about euclid has looked on beauty bare—

Kane's cigaret fell from his mouth.

It seemed that the wild hammering of his heart must drown out the double thought that rivered in his brain, the thought of a physics student, a very ordinary young man save that he was quite wrapped up in the primitive satisfaction of hounding down a problem, and the other thought, the one that was listening in.

—she—

He stood with closed eyes, asway on his feet, breathing as if he ran up a mountain. *—are You there? are You there?—*

—not daring to believe: what do i feel?—

—i was the man on the train—

—& i was the woman—

A shuddering togetherness.

"Hey! Hey, mister, is anything wrong?"

Almost Kane snarled. Her thought was so remote, on the very rim of indetectability, he could get nothing but sub-vocalized words, nothing of the self, and this busybody—"No, thank, I'm OK, just a, a little winded." —*where are You, where can i find You o my darling?*—

—*image of a large white building/ right over here & they call it dwinnelle hall & i am sitting on the bench outside & please come quickly please be here i never thought this could become real—*

Kane broke into a run. For the first time in fifteen years, he was unaware of his human surroundings. There were startled looks, he didn't see them, he was running to her and she was running too.

—*my name is norman kane & i was not born to that name but took it from people who adopted me because i fled my father (horrible how mother died in darkness & he would not let her have drugs though it was cancer & he said drugs were sinful and pain was good for the soul & he really honestly believed that) & when the power first appeared i made slips and he beat me and said it was witchcraft & i have searched all my life since & i am a writer but only because i must live but it was not aliveness until this moment—*

—*o my poor kicked beloved/ i had it better/ in me the power grew more slowly and i learned to cover it & i am twenty years old & came here to study but what are books at this moment—*

He could see her now. She was not conventionally beautiful, but neither was she ugly, and there was kindness in her eyes and on her mouth.

—*what shall i call you? to me you will always be You but there must be a name for the mindmutes & i have a place in the country among old trees & such few people as live nearby are good folk/ as good as life will allow them to be—*

—*then let me come there with you & never leave again—*

They reached each other and stood a foot apart. There was no need for a kiss or even a handclasp . . . not yet. It was the minds which leaped out and enfolded and became one.

—I REMEMBER THAT AT THE AGE OF THREE I DRANK OUT OF THE TOILET BOWL/ THERE WAS A PECULIAR FASCINATION TO IT & I USED TO STEAL LOOSE CHANGE FROM MY MYTHER THOUGH SHE HAD LITTLE ENOUGH TO CALL HER OWN SO I COULD SNEAK DOWN TO THE DRUGSTORE FOR ICE CREAM & I SQUIRMED OUT OF THE DRAFT & THESE ARE THE DIRTY EPISODES INVOLVING WOMEN—

—AS A CHILD I WAS NOT FOND OF MY GRANDMOTHER THOUGH SHE LOVED ME AND ONCE I PLAYED THE FOLLOWING FIENDISH TRICK ON HER & AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN I MADE AN UTTER FOOL OF MYSELF IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER & I HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY CHASTE CHIEFLY BECAUSE OF FEAR BUT MY VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES ARE NUMBERED IN THE THOUSANDS—

Eyes watched eyes with horror.

—*it is not that you have sinned for i know everyone has done the same or similar things or would if they had our gift & i know too that it is nothing serious or abnormal & of course you have decent instincts & are ashamed—*

—*just so/ it is that you know what i have done & you know every last little wish & thought & buried uncleanness & in the top of my head i know it doesn't mean anything but down underneath is all which was drilled into me when i was just a baby & i will not admit to ANYONE else that such things exist in ME—*

A car whispered by, homeward bound. The trees talked in the light sunny wind.

A boy and girl went hand in hand.

The thought hung cold under the sky, a single thought in two minds.

—*get out. i hate your bloody guts.—*

FRITZ LEIBER

Even among the versatile creators of science-fantasy, Fritz Leiber's versatility is extraordinary. His GATHER, DARKNESS! and DESTINY TIMES THREE are major classics in the detailed extrapolation of future cultures. He has also written rousing melodrama, bitter satire, legendary adventure, chilling ghost stories and even hilarious farce; but perhaps his most characteristic and individual role is that of the symbolic poet of the remote future—as he has memorably demonstrated in When the Last Gods Die (F & SF, December, 1951), The Big Holiday (January, 1953; reprinted in the Bleiler-Dikty BEST S.-F. STORIES: 1954) and now in

THE BIG TREK

I DIDN'T know if I'd got to this crazy place by rocket, space dodger, time twister—or maybe even on foot the way I felt so beat. My memory was gone. When I woke up there was just the desert all around me with the gray sky pressing down like the ceiling of an enormous room. The desert . . . and the big trek. And *that* was enough to make me stop grabbing for my memory and take a quick look at my pants to make sure I was human.

These, well, animals were shuffling along about four abreast in a straggly line that led from one end of nowhere to the other, right past my rocky hole. Wherever they were

heading they seemed to have come from everywhere and maybe everywhen. There were big ones and little ones, some like children and some just small. A few went on two feet, but more on six or eight, and there were wrigglers, rollers, oozers, flutterers and hoppers; I couldn't decide whether the low-flying ones were pets or pals. Some had scales, others feathers, bright armor like beetles or fancy hides like zebras, and quite a few wore transparent suits holding air or other gases, or water or other liquids, though some of the suits were tailored for a dozen tentacles and some for no legs at all. And darn if their shuffle—to pick one word for all the kinds of movement—wasn't more like a dance than a lockstep.

They were too different from each other for an army, yet they weren't like refugees either, for refugees wouldn't dance and make music, even if on more feet than two or four and with voices and instruments so strange I couldn't tell which was which. Their higgledy-piggledy variety suggested a stampede from some awful disaster or a flight to some ark of survival, but I couldn't feel panic in them—or solemn purpose either, for that matter. They just shuffled happily along. And if they were a circus parade, as a person might think from their being animals and some of them dressed fancy, then who was bossing the show and where were the guards or the audience, except for me?

I should have been afraid of such a horde of monsters, but I wasn't, so I got up from behind the rock I'd been spying over and I took one last look around for footprints or blast-scar or time twister whorls or some sign of how I'd get there, and then I shrugged my shoulders and walked down toward them.

They didn't stop and they didn't run, they didn't shoot and they didn't shout, they didn't come out to capture or escort me, they kept on shuffling along without a break in the rhythm, but a thousand calm eyes were turned on me from the tops of weaving stalks or the depths of bony caverns, and as I got close a dusky roller like an escaped

tire with green eyes in the unspinning hub speeded up a little and an opal octopus in a neat suit brimful of water held back, making room for me.

Next thing I knew I was restfully shuffling along myself, wondering how the roller kept from tipping and why the octopus moved his legs by threes, and how so many different ways of moving could be harmonized like instruments in a band. Around me was the murmuring rise and fall of languages I couldn't understand and the rainbow-changing of color patches that might be languages for the eye—the octopus dressed in water looked from time to time like a shaken-up *pousse-café*.

I tried out on them what I seemed to remember as the lingoos of a dozen planets, but nobody said anything back at me directly—I almost tried Earth-talk on them, but something stopped me. A puffy bird-thing floating along under a gas-bag that was part of its body settled lightly on my shoulder and hummed gently in my ear and dropped some suspicious-looking black marbles and then bobbed off. A thing on two legs from somewhere ahead in the trek waltzed its way to my side and offered me a broken-edged chunk that was milky with light and crusty. The thing looked female, being jauntily built and having a crest of violet feathers, but instead of nose and mouth her face tapered to a rosy little ring and where breasts would be there was a burst of pink petals. I gave my non-Earth lingoos another try. She waited until I was quiet and then she lifted the crusty chunk to her rosy ring, which she opened a little, and then she offered the chunk to me again. I took it and tasted it and it was like brick cheese but flaky and I ate it. I nodded and grinned and she puffed out her petals and traced a circle with her head and turned to go. I almost said, "Thanks, chick," because that seemed the right thing, but again something stopped me.

So the big trek had accepted me, I decided, but as the day wore on (if they had days here, I reminded myself) the feeling of acceptance didn't give me any real security.

It didn't satisfy me that I had been given eats instead of being eaten and that I was part of a harmony instead of a discord. I guess I was expecting too much. Or maybe I was finding a strange part of myself and was frightened of it. And after all it isn't reassuring to shuffle along with intelligent animals you can't talk to, even if they act friendly and dance and sing and now and then thrum strange strings. It didn't calm me to feel that I was someplace that was homey and at the same time as lonely as the stars. The monsters around me got to seem stranger and stranger, I quit seeing their little tricks of personality and saw only their outsides. I craned my neck trying to spot the chick with the pink petals but she was gone. After a while I couldn't bear it any longer. Some ruins looking like chopped-off skyscrapers had come in sight earlier and we were just now passing them, not too close, so although the flat sky was getting darker and pressing down lower and although there were distant flashes of lightning and rumbles of thunder (I think that's what they were) I turned at a right angle and walked away fast from the trek.

Nobody stopped me and pretty soon I was hidden in the ruins. They were comforting at first, the little ruins, and I got the feeling my ancestors had built them. But then I came to the bigger ones and they *were* chopped-off skyscrapers and yet some of them were so tall they scratched the dark flat sky and for a moment I thought I heard a distant squeal like chalk on a giant blackboard that set my teeth on edge. And then I got to wondering what had chopped off the skyscrapers and what had happened to the people, and after that I began to see dark things loafing along after me close to the ruined walls. They were about as big as I was, but going on all fours. They began to follow me closer and closer, moving like clumsy wolves, the more notice I took of them. I saw that their faces were covered with hair like their bodies and that their jaws were working. I started to hurry and as soon as I did I began to hear the sounds they were making. The bad thing was

that although the sounds were halfway between growls and barks, I could understand them.

"Hello, Joe."

"Whacha know, Joe?"

"That so, Joe?"

"Let's blow, Joe."

"C'mon Joe, let's go, go, gol"

And then I realized the big mistake I'd made in coming to these ruins, and I turned around and started to run back the way I had come, and they came loping and lurching after me, trying to drag me down, and the worst thing was that I knew they didn't want to kill me, but just have me get down on all fours and run with them and bark and growl.

The ruins grew smaller, but it was very dark now and at first I was afraid that I had lost my way and next I was afraid that the end of the big trek had passed me by, but then the light brightened under the low sky like the after-glow of a sunset and it showed me the big trek in the distance and I ran toward it and the hairy things stopped skulking behind me.

I didn't hit the same section of the big trek, of course, but one that was enough alike to make me wonder. There was another dusky roller, but with blue eyes and smaller, so that it had to spin faster, and another many-legged creature dressed in water, and a jaunty chick with crimson crest and a burst of orange petals. But the difference didn't bother me.

The trek slowed down, the change in rhythm rippling back to me along the line. I looked ahead and there was a large round hole in the low sky and through it I could see the stars. And through it too the trek itself was swerving, each creature diving upward toward the winking points of light.

I kept on shuffling happily forward, though more slowly now, and to either side of the trek I saw heaped on the desert floor spacesuits tailored to fit every shape of creature I

could imagine and fly him or her safely through the emptiness above. After a while it got to be my turn and I found a suit and climbed into it and zipped it snug and located the control buttons in the palms of the gloves and looked up. Then I felt more than control buttons in my fingers and I looked to either side of me and I was hand in hand with an octopus wearing an eight-legged spacesuit over his water-filled one and on the other side with a suited-up chick who sported a jet-black crest and pearl-gray petals.

She traced a circle with her head and I did the same, and the octopus traced a smaller circle with a free tentacle, and I knew that one of the reasons I hadn't used Earth-talk was that I was going to keep quiet until I learned or remembered *their* languages, and that another reason was that the hairy four-footers back in the ruins had been men like me and I hated them but these creatures beside me were my kind, and that we had come to take one last look at the Earth that had destroyed itself and at the men who had stayed on Earth and not got away like me—to come back and lose my memory from the shock of being on my degraded ancestral planet.

Then we clasped hands tight, which pushed the buttons in our palms. Our jets blossomed out behind us and we were diving up together out of this world through the smoothly rounded doughnut hole toward the stars. I realized that space wasn't empty and that those points of light in the blackness weren't lonely at all.

In Memoriam: FLETCHER PRATT

And saw the Norns, and spoke their island speech,
Who questioned him with fury in their single eye,
Where he was going with his red beard high,
And marmoset glance, with aeons in his reach,
What smoky warriors to riddle and to teach
In Nifelheim, the mead at last drained dry
And asp-ringed roots of Yggdrasil for sky
Until the roaring trumpet and the final breach.

"Out of time; it is not great enough.
"Out of space; I walked it, wall to wall.
"Out of the word, container for the thing contained,
"Out of every thick and dubious stuff
"Into the heart," And that was all.
And passed the furious threesome, who are chained.

June 10, 1956

JAMES BLISH

FULL CIRCLE

Imagine ourselves imagined: who thought us up? The one
Who could suppose a race of such supposers
Would have to be Imagination plus,
Extrapolating variables in variables,
Till we imagine Him as He did us.

DOROTHY COWLES PINKNEY

YES, BUT . . .

I accept the existence of saucers,
I concede there's a case
To be made for believing that something's achieving
The conquest of space;
I find it completely convincing
Whenever I hear
That creatures from Venus were recently seen as
A spaceship drew near:
And yet there's a problem remaining
That baffles me still.
I'm not disagreeing that some superbeing
Can wander at will
From one universe to another—
But if it be thus
Why on earth (so to speak) should he bother to seek
Any contact with *us*?

ANTHONY BRODE

LYRIC FOR ATOM SPLITTERS

Now I am Faust and Faust is you;
And we the Witch who hailed Macbeth;
We have the lightnings of a god
But not his eons. We know death,

And balanced on a tautened rope,
Precarious, high above earth
We place our poised, foolhardy feet
That go toward ending—came from birth.

But in this lively enterprise
We wonder sometimes what we do
Besides achieving balance: Faust,
I, and the Witch—and you.

DORIS PITKIN BUCK

THE HORROR STORY SHORTER BY ONE LETTER THAN THE SHORTEST HORROR STORY EVER WRITTEN

The last man on Earth sat alone
in a room. There was a lock on the
door.

RON SMITH

ACE BOOKS PRESENTS

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Third Series

Sixteen stories including such authors as Philip Jose Farmer, William Lindsay Gresham, Ward Moore, Idris Seabright, Alfred Bester, R. Bretnor, etc.

D-422 35¢

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Fourth Series

Sixteen stories featuring top-notch tales by C.M. Kornbluth, Ray Bradbury, Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson, Shirley Jackson, Robert Sheckley, etc.

D-455 35¢

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Fifth Series

A Who's Who of imaginative authors including Arthur C. Clarke, Shirley Jackson, Isaac Asimov, Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, James Blish, Fredric Brown, etc.

F-105 40¢

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Sixth Series

Another outstanding collection of first rate writers including C.S. Lewis, Frederik Pohl, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Ward Moore, C.M. Kornbluth, and many more.

F-131 40¢

May be ordered direct from Ace Books (Sales Dept.), 23 West 47th St., New York 36, N. Y. (Add 5¢ a volume for handling charges.) Order by book number please.

"Being an unabashed admirer of Anthony Boucher's editorial talent, I have nothing but praise for THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: 7TH SERIES, a collection of fifteen of the very best stories from Mr. B's consistently excellent magazine.

"As usual, Mr. Boucher has assembled a winner. Heartily recommended."

—George W. Earley
Hartford Courant

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

POUL ANDERSON

BERTRAM CHANDLER

CHAD OLIVER

MILDRED CLINGERMANN

C. M. KORNBLUTH

FRITZ LEIBER

AVRAM DAVIDSON

IDRIS SEABRIGHT

WILL STANTON

ISAAC ASIMOV

FREDRIC BROWN

WARD MOORE

G. C. EDMONDSON

ROBERT F. YOUNG